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# A LONDON SEASON.

BY ANNIE THOMAS,

(MRS. PENDER OUDLIP.)

AUTHOR OF "DENNIS DONNE," "SIR VICTOR'S CHOICE,"  
"STRAY SHEEP," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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# A GOOD SETTLEMENT.



## CHAPTER IV.

### WORTHY OF MISS LUTTREL.

A WOMAN'S voice—distinctly a woman's voice was making itself heard in that library which Stephen Malling had insisted on keeping sacred to himself, even from his own wife, at this weird uncanny hour between midnight and the dawn of another day. The influence of the time was upon me, thrilling me with the indefinable terror of the indefinite, to which the bravest and rashest of us are prone. It came upon me suddenly to remember that I was that most wretched of all things, an amateur detective

—a mere spy in this Mr. Malling's household! What if I were discovered, and brought up before a local magistrate for punishment? I—a Miss Luttrell! My brain reeled as I contemplated the possibility.

My brain reeled and my teeth chattered, but happily both brain and teeth performed their work inaudibly. Not a sign from the interior of the library was made that could lead me to suppose a sound from the hall—from *me* in fact—had penetrated into it. Indeed, the stillness grew and grew till it became oppressive. At the risk of my life and reputation, of Harty's safety and happiness, of everything I held dearest, in fact, I gently turned the handle and opened the door.

The room was empty!

For a moment or two I thought I must

be the victim of madness or sorcery. At the expiration of that time I recalled my scattered senses and brought them to bear upon the scene before me. The room was empty, but a door was open in the wall opposite—the wall that had presented nothing but closely-packed rows of well-bound books to my vision on the occasion of my former visit.

With the dexterity of a cat I crossed the room noiselessly, and looked through that open doorway. The lamp from the library mantelpiece showed me a dark passage only. But that dark passage led to some place which I would discover and explore before Mr. Malling was many hours older. All that I could do that night was to make a note of the volumes through which the door opened, and effect my escape with silence and celerity before Mr. Malling returned.

It was easy enough to find the spring now that the door was open. The spring itself was the initial letter of one of Dickens's most famous books. It would be impossible that I could forget that in order to get into that passage I had to press the "P" in "Pickwick."

As soon as I got myself safely into the hall I regained my courage, and thought it would be as well for me to wait and listen for Mr. Malling's return.

I thought I had the ears of a hare that night, and dared trust myself to catch the sound of his coming back into the library in time to flee into the darkness of the staircase before he could get into the hall. But either his was a stealthier foot-fall than I had bargained for, or the anxiety and excitement under which I laboured deadened my sense of sound. At any rate, whatever the cause

of my dulness of hearing, this was the effect of it—that the door opened suddenly and I found myself face to face with my dreaded brother-in-law !

“I suspected something of this,” he said, reaching out his hand and drawing my unresisting form into the room.

Now that the climax had come my courage returned, and I followed him readily enough, imagining that my disguise secured me from being identified, and feeling that the discovery I had made relative to the presence of a woman in his library and a secret passage leading from it placed him in my power. To a certain extent I felt as if I had the ball at my feet, though I was alone with this unscrupulous man, far from all human help.

“He will not think it worth while to murder a servant,” I said to myself. “He

will try to bribe me into silence." And for a few moments, as I thought this, I felt positively amused at the idea of the confusion that would overwhelm him when I brought powerful friends to our aid on the morrow, and released my sister from her state of bondage by proclaiming his sin and shame.

But in indulging in these vain imaginings I reckoned without my host with a vengeance.

"Since you have favoured me with a visit at this unseemly hour, perhaps you will take a seat and tell me to what I am indebted for the unsolicited honour."

My spirit rebelled as he said these words in diabolically insolent tones, but I merely answered, quietly—

"My mistress is sleeping uneasily. I

am alarmed—seriously alarmed—about her health, sir.”

“You came to tell me this?”

“I came with no other thought than to serve her,” I said, as firmly as I could.

“You evade my question because you don’t like to tell a direct lie,” he said, with a rough laugh. “It’s no use—your cleverness can’t save you now—you have been caught in the act of spying and eavesdropping, and you have been baffled. All you have gained for your trouble is the knowledge that I sit up late in my library, reading and writing, as many other gentlemen do. You can’t bring that as an accusation of cruelty to your mistress against me.”

“Few other gentlemen, I should hope, have midnight meetings with ladies in their libraries and concealed passages, the

secret of which is not known to their wives."

"You fool! what are you driving at?" he asked, tauntingly. "You are either mad or dreaming, or—may I suggest it?—perhaps you have been supporting yourself on your way here by a visit to the wine on the sideboard"

"I am neither mad, dreaming, nor dazed by wine," I said, calmly, for I almost pitied him now that I had him so completely in my power; "if you will follow me I will lead you to and through a secret passage."

He rose and bowed acquiescence, and I confidently advanced to the sham shelf wherein I should find that little letter "P" which sheltered the spring. To my utter bewilderment "Pickwick" had vanished from its place, and in my despair I turned to him and exclaimed,

“You have foiled me now, but when a stronger arm than mine—the arm of the law—is stretched out to find the way you took just now with that woman, you will admit that I have had all my senses about me to-night.”

I heard him mutter something about his idiocy in having left the study door unlocked before he said, aloud,

“You can swear you are not labouring under an hallucination? You have been in this room before I brought you in to-night?”

Rapidly heaping contempt and confusion upon him I thought as I spoke, I told him what I had discovered and how I had discovered it.

“Ah! a quick-witted girl, by Jove!” he exclaimed, with apparently irrepressible admiration. And I thought I was deceiving

him all the time. "A quick-witted girl, by Jove! just the coadjutor I want—one who is equally ready to be mysterious and merciful. Supposing I show you the way you so sarcastically offered to show me just now—supposing I take you through the secret passage to the hidden lady?"

I shrank instinctively for a moment from the thought of trusting myself with him. But then I remembered how pleased Donald Stuart would be with me, and how proud he would be of me if I pursued this adventure to an end that should be satisfactory to Harty. Accordingly I agreed to follow him on two conditions. One was that he should leave the doors open behind us—the other was that he should offer no impediment to my return if my heart failed me.

He pledged his word of honour to observe

these conditions, and in foolish faith I followed him.

The passage was long, low, and winding, and it declined so rapidly that we were soon on a level with the cellars. Then the way took an upward turn over some rough-hewn steps, and presently I felt the unmistakable breath of fresh outside air. In another moment we came to the surface close to the neat privet hedge of the decoy keeper's cottage—a cottage I had often noticed in passing with my mistress, on account of the extraordinary cleanliness and delicacy of so much of its interior arrangement as was visible through its often open door and windows.

It was grey earliest dawn by this time, and I could only just catch the outline of that closely-trimmed fence of privet, but the cottage was fast shut and closed up

apparently. Not a light gleamed from one of its curtained windows. Nevertheless, Mr. Malling seemed very sure of his footing and his welcome, I thought, as he led me up the little garden path, unlocked the house-door, and admitted me into a tiny porch-room.

“Not frightened yet?” he whispered to me in the darkness, and though every tooth chattered and every nerve quivered, I answered, firmly enough,

“Not a bit, Mr. Malling, now that I am out of the bowels of the earth again. I will tell you that I am not to be frightened by a creature who is lower and guiltier than I am myself—a good man might terrify me into submission, *you* never can do that.”

“Come on! no histrionics, if you please,” he said, grimly, and then he struck a light

and I saw that I was in a small square entrance-passage, closely curtained all round. As I was accustoming my eyes to the light he pulled aside a portière, and I found myself in a good-sized room, in which a fire was burning dimly, a woman was lying stretched upon the bed, and a middle-aged woman—a cross between an experienced Gamp and an inexperienced cook—was advancing to meet me rather fiercely.

“Be quiet, Bridget,” he said, much as he would have spoken to a faithful and obedient dog, I fancied. “How is she now? I have brought this lady to see if she can do any good.”

The woman shook her head despairingly.

“Oh, Mr. Malling, that she should have found that way in a moment like, and got herself into *your* house after all our care. It was not my fault, sir.”

"'Twas no one's fault, but fate," he interrupted.

"'Twas just that, Mr. Malling. Times and oft she might have got away and she didn't, and just to-night I turned my back and then she was gone as the sparks fly upward, and to the last day of my life she'll blame me, and what thanks shall I get from you?"

"None! unless you hold your tongue," he said, sharply. "The last day of her life, poor thing—that's not far distant," he added, more softly, and then he stepped towards the side of the bed on which the woman was lying and beckoned me to approach.

"Here lies the cause of all your suspicions and anxieties and of all my troubles," he said pointing to a seraphic-faced young woman who was lying—her arms thrown child-wise

over her head—asleep upon the bed. A restful Ophelia—a perfect embodiment of a lovely loving spirit, at peace for the time, she looked as she lay there. There was a piteousness in her loveliness that made me long to be of service to her at once.

Involuntarily I knelt down by the side of the bed and parted the soft yellow-brown hair off her brow.

“Who is she? What is her name? Why is she here?” I questioned presently, in an impatient whisper, and he answered, with a sorrowful dignity, that gave me altogether a different impression of the man to any I had entertained of him previously—

“She is a Mrs. Spalding, the widow of a cousin of mine, who so strongly resembled me that since her mind has been darkened she is unable to distinguish between us. She is here because, hard as you think me,

I have never had the heart to put her into an asylum. Strong hopes of her ultimate recovery are held out to me, and when she goes back to the society she so loved and adorned it will not greet her as a restored lunatic—thanks to my care of her.”

I rose up from my knees and approached him.

“Are you telling me the truth?” I murmured. “Oh, Mr. Malling, what misery you would have spared us all if you had only confided this to Harty.”

I stopped as abruptly as if I had been shot as I made that mention of my sister’s name, which would, I felt sure, betray me to him. To my astonishment, however, he took no notice of the slip of the tongue, but merely said—

“I had reasons—foolish reasons, perhaps  
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you may consider them—for deeming it well

to keep Mrs. Malling in ignorance of the existence of this most unhappy woman. Few women have the nobility of heart and breadth of mind to get over a bad impression made upon them at first by another woman. Mrs. Malling is not one of the few. The secrecy I have so sedulously maintained about this unhappy lady would have prejudiced my wife against her. Mrs. Spalding's own words very often would seem to be self-condemnatory."

As he was speaking the lady started from her sleep—she had thrown herself on the bed without moving a heavy Spanish lace mantilla, which suited her fair beauty well—and gazed at us with frightened wonder.

"Stephen, Stephen, why is *she* here?" she sobbed, pointing to me. "Oh, take her away; isn't it enough for me to know that she lives in honour and glory at the

house where I lived happily once? Why bring her here to see me in my ruin—in my ruin—in my ruin?”

She repeated the words “in my ruin” several times, with such a musical cadence that they seemed to set themselves to a doleful tune which I felt prophetically would haunt me all my life.

“She is here because she heard you in my study, dear,” he said with wonderful tenderness; “she would have found you out even if I had not brought her, and I, knowing that, brought her, hoping to make her your friend.”

“The woman who is called *your* wife my friend, indeed!” she said, sarcastically.

“She is not the woman who is—my wife!” he replied firmly but gently; “she lives with my wife as her maid.”

“You would force me into friendship



with a servant? You would put *me* on a par with *her* maid, Stephen?"

Her anger, her indignation, her beauty, her helplessness, were one and all so painfully pretty and touching that I was being won by her fast.

"She is not a servant," he said, coming and taking my hand; "for love of her sister, who is my wife, Miss Luttrell has condescended to masquerade for a time, and if she will be the friend and aid to you that I hope she will be I shall bless her for the freak."

"How—when did you find me out?" I asked, nearly fainting with horror and shame, and he answered—so much more kindly than I had thought he could ever possibly speak to me—

"I found you out the day you came into my house, and I forgave you the deception

you were striving to practise upon me, for I saw an element of good in your presence. And now we must go back—say good night to Mrs. Spalding and come away.”

Humbled and bewildered I obeyed him without demur, but she shrank from me, shrugging her shoulders and refusing my proffered hand.

“Shake hands with Miss Luttrell at once—at once!” he said, in that peremptory masterful manner which I knew so well, and she obeyed him tremblingly, wistfully, as if she loved and feared him.

“And now back to your post at once—at once, young lady!” he continued, turning to me; “you have had an exciting night and must need rest. Moreover, I should be sorry for your sister to wake and find you absent.”

I followed him back through the winding

passage and into the sombre library silently. When I reached that harbour of refuge, and saw that the door into the hall was mercifully open, a sudden impulse seized me and I turned to him,”

“I have always distrusted you and disliked you ; I think now, that I have wronged you. What I have done I have done for the love of my sister, but I have been over-jealous in my love for her and fear of you.”

I held my hand out timidly towards him, and he took it coldly and ungraciously, I thought, but still he took it.

“Is my sister to know—to know—”

“Of your discovery and mine ?” he interrupted. “Well, Miss Luttrel, perhaps, for your sister’s sake, we had better keep our own counsel. It will disturb her to no good purpose to know of the existence of that unhappy woman in the cottage yonder,

and it will strengthen her keenly in her habits of self-pity if she find that you are so anxious about her that you have deemed it necessary to stoop to this disguise in order to keep near her."

"Then I must leave," I sobbed out; "it would be impossible for me to play one part to Harty and another to you; but for mercy's sake let me stay on as her sister, not as a servant," I added, with sudden energy.

He shook his head in a cold contemptuous way, that negatived my proposition far more effectually than any words could have done.

"You must stay here as servant and spy—the original part for which you were cast when this little comedy commenced—or you must go at once, before my wife is harassed with doubts and fears," he said, quietly. "I will put the case before you very

plainly : if you stay you can satisfy yourself that your sister does not receive unkind treatment at my hands ; if you decide to go away your imagination is likely to run riot, and it may possibly end in our all being landed in a court of justice. I should care very little if that were the end, to tell the truth, for I am weary of this life of shocking reality and sham respectability. I am tired of the sight of an eternally dejected and suspicious wife, I have learnt to abhor you as a domestic detective, and I feel that my poor cousin's wretched widow is a stone round my neck—so if you have it in your mind to go away and betray me, don't let your conscience interfere to stop you, only do your worst at once—at once."

I stood before him shivering in body and shattered in mind, but still with my senses about me sufficiently to understand that

there was something more in all this mystery than had been made clear to me yet. He *seemed* to have made such a free confession to me ! He *seemed* to wish to gain my co-operation so honestly and honourably ! Yet all the time he regarded me in a furtive uneasy way, that re-doubled my suspicions of him. Why did he use those words "at once ! at once !" so fiercely and pointedly on all occasions ?

I trembled, but at the same time I took keen watchful notice of every tone and look of his.

"I want to do my best for Harty, not my worst for you," I said.

"Our interests are identical, understand ; her weal is mine. Keep her at ease and unsuspecting and happy, and you will be serving me ; let her suspect anything, and fret and fume herself ill, and both she and

you will be worse than stumbling-blocks in my path. Do you understand ? ”

“ I only understand that I am afraid of you and anxious for my sister—so anxious and unhappy, in fact, that I *dare* not stay here any longer, Mr. Malling, unless I stay as her sister—not your agent.”

“ You’re a fool, an over-scrupulous fool,” he said, mournfully. “ You *might* have been such an aid to me ; you *might* have done so much good ; you *might* have averted so much misery ; but just as you *might* do all these things you get tired of the part you assumed. So go your way, Miss Luttrel—if you refuse to stay in my service you shall not remain in my house.”

His manner had grown so strange and threatening that I was glad to leave him as he directed me to do—glad to hie away up

those long dark stairs into the little room I occupied next to my sister's.

The servants were about, and I had hard work to escape their observation. The morning light was straggling in on Harty's sleeping face as I peeped in at her. She looked so haggard, so old, so altered from the bright blooming Harty she had been before this hateful marriage of hers that I took a sudden resolution. I would tell her all—everything! I would not only reveal myself to her but I would also reveal the secret passage and the secluded cousin! My sister should know all and judge for herself.

So I took off my false hair and eyebrows, removed the olive complexion and the dextrously-simulated suggestions of wrinkles, put on one of the dresses in which she had been accustomed to see me at home, and

bending over my sleeping sister strove to rouse her to wakefulness in my natural voice.

“Harty ! Harty ! my darling sister !”

She woke frightened and feverish, and held out her arms to me in a way that showed me she had been craving for my presence, and found comfort in it now that she had it.

“How did you get here ? Does Stephen know ? Will he let you stay ?” she began, eagerly, and then, with her head resting on my shoulder, I told her all I have told the reader.

She heard the whole story without interrupting me once.

“Poor crushed Harty ! she is going to continue enduring ! she is going to bear to be parted from me ! she is going to resign

herself to the inevitable!" I thought, for a moment or two. Then she spoke.

"Help me up, Laura; dress me as quickly as you can," she said, falling naturally into the style she was accustomed to use to her maid. "I don't believe this story—I cannot believe that this lovely woman of whom you tell me is the lunatic widow of his cousin! Nonsense! the whole thing is a fraud, and I am the victim of it."

She broke down then, weeping bitterly, and declaring herself to be one of the most unhappy and ill-used of God's creatures.

"The whole thing is a fraud, a sham, a mockery; my marriage, most likely, is no marriage at all. Oh! Laura, how shall I ever face the world after this—this *shameful* discovery? Poor mother! how her heart will be wrung. And papa! fancy his wrath

and disappointment, Laura, when I go back to him a wife and no wife—a betrayed, dishonoured woman !”

“ You are not that,” I said, confidently.

“ Nonsense ! Don’t weary me by uttering such an absurdity ; you say it as if you felt sure and knew all about it—and you don’t feel sure—and you can’t possibly know more about it than I do myself,” she retorted, with fiery impatience. And then she grew her gentle self again and besought me to forgive her for her unjust anger against one “ who had been the most faithful, loving, brave, and tender sister and friend to her.”

As soon as she was dressed I took her a cup of tea and tried to persuade her to eat something in order to strengthen her nerves for the coming interview with her husband. But she was too much excited and unhappy

to eat, and all my endeavours were futile.

“What will you say when you meet your husband, Harty?” I asked presently.

“Don’t call him my husband. When I meet Mr. Malling, I shall tell him that I shall go away from his house this very day—disgraced, and hating him more than I ever hated him before—more than woman ever hated man before in this world.”

“That will be foolish,” I said concisely.

“Foolish! Do you expect me to act very wisely in this emergency? That I keep my senses at all is wonderful considering how I have suffered, and what silent helpless revolt I have been in for so many long months. Oh! Laura, I can’t hope to make you understand what I feel; I hardly understand it myself. I have lived in such dull indefinable terror of him that I shall be

*almost* relieved when the worst gets known —when I'm publicly disgraced and proved not to be his wife—to be free of him. It's something to live for that prospect, at least."

"I have been a faithful witness, Harty ; I have told you how strongly he emphasised the words 'my wife' in speaking of you to—to her. You are that, poor child, fast enough ; but in one way you may be free of him, for I can swear that you go in fear of your life of him, and, Harty ! sometimes I have thought that you do not do so without just cause."

My tone was very serious as I said this, and I saw that it affected her, for she cast a frightened glance at the reflection of her wan wasted face in the mirror. Then the colour rushed all over her brow and cheeks as she said,

"Oh! Laura, and this is the end of my not having the patience to wait for Donald Stuart. Lady Doynethorpe should have given me a hint when this hateful Malling match was projected."

"I gave you a hint."

"Ah! but you were only my sister; she is his cousin, and on her authority I would have waited, I would have been patient."

"Put all thoughts of his possible love away from you now, unless you would be a more miserable woman than you are already," I said, seriously. And then I ventured to ask a question to which I did long to have a truthful answer.

"Did you really care for Donald, Harty? did you love him?"

She shrugged her shoulders wearily and turned her head away.

"What is the use of asking me that

now? You say yourself I'm bound hard and fast to this—this other man, and that I shall be a more miserable woman than I am at present if I let myself think about what might have been if I were free and Donald true." She said this peevishly, but I could not find it in my heart to feel annoyed with her now.

"Poor unhappy child, perhaps Donald will play a brother's part to you even yet," I said to myself, and the thought of him gave me courage. If Harty should resolve to go from Marshlands, and Mr. Malling should see fit to try to detain her, happily Donald was here and to him I could appeal in sure reliance.

It was midday before that dreaded interview between Harty and Mr. Malling came off. He came into her room in a careless nonchalant way, as if he expected she would

receive him just as usual. But he cast a quick keen glance at me as he came, and saw at once from my altered appearance that I had been what he considered indiscreet and disobedient.

“Miss Luttrell with you, Harty! I am surprised at this, indeed.”

“You are *not* surprised!” she retorted, fiercely. “Why pretend and be a hypocrite about Laura’s sham in the matter any longer? You have known all along that she was my sister, and so you played a falser part than you need have done—played it from sheer love of falseness—and aided in deceiving me still further when you had already so cruelly deceived me that all the world will call you a monster when your conduct gets known.”

“Brain mischief at work,” he said, signifi-

cantly, turning to me, and I exclaimed indignantly,

"My sister is no more mad than I am myself or than you are, sir. How dare you imply it?"

"They're so subtle—so subtle, these brain diseases," he went on uneasily. "You hardly know how they begin or in what form they are going to manifest themselves. Look at me steadily, Harty, if you can."

She shrank away shudderingly from him, averting her gaze, and showing hatred, abhorrence, and fear of him in every lineament of her expressive face and every gesture of her trembling limbs.

"Don't come near me!" she cried. "Look at you, you say! Why should I look at anything so utterly bad and base and cowardly? You have broken my heart, you have ruined my happiness, you have

destroyed my reputation. Why should I look at such a monster, at such a blot on nature, at such a—”

“She *is* mad,” he muttered aloud. “Was there ever a man so tried as I am? *Two* mad women thrust upon me by fate, and one of them my own still dearly-loved wife.”

He held out his arms and made as though he would embrace her, but with a spring and a piercing cry, Harty shot past him and escaped through the door. I followed her instantly, and as we tore down stairs and fled through the hall we heard his mocking laughter pealing harshly after us.

## CHAPTER V.

### LOVE AND HONOUR.

" I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not honour more."

THREE weeks passed away after that flight from Marshlands, and the position of affairs was still as unsettled, the relations between Mr. Malling and my unhappy sister still as unsatisfactory as on the day we left that hateful married home of hers.

In my uncertainty and despair I had guided poor Harty's trembling steps to the only haven of refuge I knew of that was near—The Laurels—where the Misses Stuart had kept their dignified old-maidenly

state for the last forty years. They had taken us poor frightened wanderers in and made us welcome, for the sake of the nephew and the niece, who had often spoken to them about us. But though they were gentle and kind, hospitable and sympathetic, I could see that they thought Harty's conduct rash and mine romantically ridiculous.

"If you ask me what *I* should have done, my dear Miss Luttrell, in your place, I must tell you that I think you had no right to be in such a place at all; your sister had taken this man 'for better for worse'—she had *preferred* him to someone else who loved her, I have heard—and if she could not endure his hard stern ways, and went in fear of her life, as you say, she ought to have written to her father and claimed his protection and that of the law."

The dear old lady enunciated these dicta

with much dignity and decision, abashing me considerably, but convincing me not at all.

"Papa is one of those men who attribute the majority of evils to want of money and the rest to a woman's fancifulness, Miss Stuart," I argued. "It would have been worse than useless to appeal to him—he hates trouble and believes in Stephen Malling."

"And you hate Stephen Malling and don't believe his story about that lady."

"Not one word of it," I said, firmly. And then I took her hand and begged her not to judge us too harshly. "Intuition taught me to come to you at once. Though I had never seen you I knew you would be good and kind and give us protection."

"You've heard of me from Donald, and you took it for granted that I would

be good to the girl Donald loved once. Well, my dear, so I will, but that sister of yours is a poor weak thing in spite of her beauty, and I should have thought better of my nephew's judgment if it had gone in favour of *you*."

I blushed furiously at this. How bitterly outside the bounds of probability they all seemed to consider it that Donald should ever think of me as anything more than the sister of the girl he had loved! It was too mortifying to have it assumed that I would have been ready to take him, indifferent as he had invariably been to me. But I had the solacing reflection that at least he esteemed me! Had not his cousin, Lady Doynethorpe, told me this, and had not his eyes on several occasions told me more?

It was a strangely quiet, easy, balmy life

that we led at The Laurels, and contrasted strongly with those weeks of fear and misery and mystery at Marshlands. The ordering of the old lady's household was one of the most beautiful specimens of domestic mechanism that I have ever seen. All the wheels of management revolved so smoothly, well oiled as they were by amiability, money, and perfectly courteous consideration for every one within the walls.

The strain on Harty's spirit and system told as soon as she was safely anchored here. She broke down and sank into a weak low suffering state that was partly mental and partly low fever, and for a time our mother came over and nursed her, and we Luttrels seemed to have taken possession of The Laurels altogether.

During the whole of this time Mr. Malling, who was in communication with my father,

was unremitting in his attention. He called daily to enquire for his wife, and spoke of her with kindness and delicacy.

“I will not force my presence upon her until she has been convinced that I have always loved her, never wronged her, and that the story I told her sister about Mrs. Spalding is substantially true. The fact is, Miss Stuart, Mrs. Spalding is rather a wrong-headed and violent than a mad woman. She is too sane to be kept in an asylum, and too insane on one point to be let go at large.”

“And what is her one mad point, poor thing?” gentle-souled old Miss Stuart asked, and Mr. Malling answered,

“A mad passion for a man who never has returned and never will return it.”

“And that man is—”

“*I* am that man,” he interrupted. “Her

love for me, founded on the accident of my being like her dead husband, has been the bane of my life; it has obliged me to envelope my actions in an atmosphere of mystery that has been most obnoxious to me; it has often made me seem sulkily reserved when in reality I have only been sorely perplexed; and it has given my wife a fair excuse for leaving me."

"Ah! she will trust you and go back to you," Miss Stuart began, in comforting accents, and then he told her that he "would never coerce Harty, never again at his request should she endure the daily agony of living with a husband whom she had learnt to hate and distrust."

I felt more lenient towards him when they told me how magnanimously he had spoken. But all the time I had a lurking distrust of him, and was infinitely relieved



when he made a proposition to my father to make Harty an allowance of four hundred a year and permit her to live apart from him.

"We'll settle down in a sweet little home of our own. I couldn't go back to the manor house now, so you and I will live together in a little house somewhere near here," she said to me when she heard of his offer.

"Surely you'll like to get out of this neighbourhood?" I said.

"Surely I shall like to stay near these good kind Stuarts," she replied. "My dear Laura, I've settled already where we will build our new nest—that sweet little cottage, with a baby lawn bounded by a baby river, that stands at the entrance to Bartleton."

"Oh! let us go back among our own

people, Harty," I said, imploringly, a strong presentiment against the place she had named as a residence for us taking possession of me at once.

"I look upon the Misses Stuart as some of our own people," she said, quietly, "and they agree with me that as I have chosen to leave my husband I ought not to hide myself from him altogether; I ought to give him the satisfaction of knowing that I go on properly and quietly, horribly as he has behaved to me."

"He would feel better assured of that if you went back to your father's house, I should think," I said, bluntly, and Harty chose to be hurt and angry, and to complain to Donald Stuart (who this day visited his aunts for the first time since we had been with them) that Laura was too much inclined to treat her as if *she* were a culprit



or a suspected woman, instead of being one of the most ill-used and sinned-against of her sex.

The manner of the old love was simply perfect on this trying occasion. He would not permit himself to express anything like censure of, or indignation against, Harty's husband. Nor would he respond to her pathetic little appeals to his pity and compassion. All he allowed himself to say, even to me, was that he "was sorry to hear there had been such a serious misunderstanding, but that he trusted time would heal the breach."

From that day I was happier about my sister, for I saw that he would never make a weak and compromising exhibition of interest in her to her detriment. With him it clearly was a case of—



"I could not love thee, dear, so much.  
Loved I not honour more."

But soon after we were settled quietly down in our pretty doll's house Donald Stuart paid us another visit, and on this occasion—how wildly the mere remembrance of that time sets my heart beating still—he gave me to understand that I was the attraction that led him our way.

It was not a regular proposal, and it was not a definite engagement, but it was something near enough to both to make me very happy. “We would defer making it public and taking all the world into our confidence till our plans were more matured,” he suggested, and I acquiesced, for was not the knowledge that *I* was his chosen one and that I held his love enough for me.

Harty received the intelligence very prettily. I can recall every object that was about, and every expression that crossed her face as I told my story. Donald and I had



been out on the river banks for an hour, and I suppose our unusually prolonged absence set her thinking and surmising, for as I went in through the open French window into the little drawing-room she looked up from her employment and said—

“ Well, Laura, dear, you have something to tell me ? ”

And then—she pursuing her employment all the time—I told her Donald loved me, and that I loved him with my whole heart and mind and strength and understanding.

She was so busy all the time, and so pretty in her busy-ness, that I must try to sketch her.

A girl—a mere peach-faced and dove-eyed girl—with a figure slender and supple as a willow-wand. She was kneeling on the floor striving seriously to teach a pert pug to ride a solemn poodle. The poodle was a



black one of large size and excellent pedigree, and such an intelligence as many of his fellow-creatures on two legs might be proud of possessing. He gave his mistress no trouble, but offered a perfectly comfortable seat to the pug, whose bloated and sulky little countenance betrayed the direst alarm.

“Dog of my heart, *why* can’t you learn to balance yourself?” she exclaimed, giving the pug a smart tap on his upturned nose, as I made my little announcement. The next instant she had sprung from her knees and was embracing me.

“You deserve him, dear, and that’s compliment enough to pay him. I won’t tell him that he deserves you,” she said, kissing me warmly, and I, not feeling quite sure as to whether she had said something that ought to please me or not, began to feel disappointment creeping over me.

“You’ll see Donald and greet him as a brother before he goes back to tell his aunts, won’t you, Harty?”

She frowned impatiently.

“Have I known such happiness in the married state that I should go out and welcome and thank the first man who wants to marry my sister?”

That allusion to his being the first man who had wanted to marry me was uncalled for, I thought. Still, I would not resent it, for Harty was right. Her married experiences had been enough to embitter any woman. But even while I was thinking this, Harty added

“However, I’ll go and say all that’s nice to Donald or he may think something that I should be sorry for any man to think, least of all my future brother-in-law.” And so she passed out through the open window

—the poodle stalking solemnly along by her side, with the pug still clinging tremulously to his back—on to the lawn, and presently I saw her join Donald.

What she said to him I never knew, but whatever it was it had the effect of making him think of her as a sublime mixture of sweetness and grandeur.

“If ever there was ‘a perfect woman, nobly planned,’ it’s your sister, Harty,” he said to me that day before he left. “She spoke forgivingly and tenderly of that miscreant of a husband of hers. What a woman she must be.”

He spoke the last words so softly and regretfully that I thought he must be adding to himself, “What a woman I have lost.”

The old ladies at The Laurels were to be, with the exception of Harty, the sole

recipients of the great and happy news for a time. They welcomed me as their future niece with a grave cordiality that impressed me a good deal and made me rather nervous. Donald was like a son to them, they said, and so, though our fortunes would be narrow for a time (for Donald was only a War Office clerk), all they had would eventually be his, and The Laurels would always be a pleasant summer home for us. Then they said that they hoped I had looked well into my own heart and not pledged it lightly, out of vanity or gratitude. And when I tremblingly avowed the truth, that I had loved Donald as a woman can only love once, for all the years I had known him, they shook their heads in kindly reprobation of such unmaidenly conduct, and said that "perhaps the women were



happier after all who, like themselves, did not put their trust in men !”

Soon after [this my sister began to be subjected to a series of small annoyances that, unimportant though they were when taken and regarded separately, made up an aggregate of discomfort that drew largely upon our endurance.

Often of an evening as we would be strolling about on our little lawn, or enjoying the sultry summer night air on the river-bank, we would be startled by seeing shadows flitting to and fro in the wood at the end of the garden. Sometimes we heard voices, and two or three times the poodle and the pug got violently agitated and hurled themselves tumultuously into the dark shadow of the trees upon their unseen foes. But we seemed to be the prey of mere groundless alarms, for the dogs invari-



ably came back pacified, and the nocturnal visitors did not injure either us or our property.

But one day I missed something—the thing that I valued most of all my little worldly possessions, and this was an exquisitely painted miniature likeness of Donald Stuart, that had always stood on a little ivory easel on the drawing-room table.

We taxed the servants and had their boxes searched—a proceeding which caused them to quit us in a virtuous huff. I offered a reward, and nearly broke my heart when it proved unavailing. And then I wrote and told Donald of what had happened, and he came down on a few days' leave and took up his abode with his aunts.

During his stay, he and I were out walking one day when a neat little single brougham passed us. Unintentionally I

looked in at the window, and in the momentary glance I had of its occupant I recognised the mysterious beauty, Mrs. Spalding. She looked sane and sensible enough, handsome and happy, and by the sudden lighting up of her face I saw that she remembered me.

Hurriedly I tried to point her out to Donald, but she was past and the opportunity was gone.

## CHAPTER VI.

**"WHISPERED WORDS CAN POISON TRUTH."**

I FORGET how many days it was after that bitter loss of Donald's likeness befell me that I was called into the drawing-room to have an interview with my sister's husband.

I went into the room prepared to be antagonistic to him, for Harty, on hearing of his arrival, had thrown herself into a state of the most painful agitation, vowing between hysterical sobs that not all the legal force that might be brought to bear upon her should induce her to return and live with a man of whom she was mortally afraid.

"Perhaps he had not come to make any such suggestion," I said, soothingly. "Harty, you must admit that from the moment of your taking action and leaving his house he has behaved generously and liberally towards you."

"Generously and liberally!" she repeated, indignantly. "Heaven forgive you, Laura, for talking platitudes about such a serious matter—he has out of his abundance allowed me enough to live upon, and he has not molested me—until to-day."

"You can scarcely call his coming here and asking to see *me* molestation of *you*."

"Yes, I do, knowing to what that interview will lead. Laura, it has come into my mind lately that, if you could, you would smooth the way for me to return to my tyrant. You are so happy in the prospect of the perfect peace and respectability that

will be your portion in the convenient match you are going to make, that you're taking up the conventional British matron's position already, and sitting in the seat of the scornful above me as a wife unattached."

"Now you're unjust, Harty," I said. "Unjust and illogical, and foolish into the bargain, for you're sending me to the interview with Mr. Malling with my mind in a whirl."

"Oh! go to him—go to him by all means, without a moment's delay," she exclaimed, excitedly. "I don't understand people who run with the hare and hunt with the hounds—go to him, and between you make up something to my discredit to suit your own ends. I *wish* Donald Stuart were here—he is my only friend."

"I wish with all my heart he were," I said, surprised at her passion and stung

by her ingratitude. Then, nervously and tremblingly, I went down to Mr. Malling.

He was standing in the centre of the room with the air of one who desired to avoid contact with every surrounding object. His face was pale, his eyes fiery and restless, and his manner eager. All this I saw in a flash—the next moment revealed to me that he held in his hand my lost photograph !

I forgot Harty, her sorrows and injustice—I forgot the terror with which this man had always inspired me—I only remembered Donald and my love as I recognised my missing treasure.

“How did you get it ? Thank you, thank you, for bringing it back to me,” I cried, springing towards him and holding out my hand to have it restored to me.

“You are a capital actress, as I have good reason to know, Miss Luttrell,” he said,

sneeringly, as he flung the likeness contemptuously on the ground, "but you're failing utterly to deceive me now, and I may as well tell you so at once; you had better give up the endeavour to make me believe that *you* are personally interested in this man, over whose visits to your sister you try to throw a mantle of respectability."

"Not personally interested; I—I—"

I was on the point of saying "I am engaged to him," but the recollection of that fatal promise I had given to Donald that I would not publish the fact of our engagement until he gave me permission to do so hampered me, tied my tongue, rendered me helpless from confusion.

"You are very loyal to your sister, and very false to me and your instincts of morality," he went on, pressing his hand to his head as if he were in pain; "you think

me a traitor—a double-dyed villain—a scoundrel of the lowest type—because I have been foolishly lenient to a woman's weakness; but I have not deserved this bitter shameful retribution, that you should aid my wife in meeting her lover."

"Oh! he is mine, mine only!" I cried, throwing prudence to the winds at the instigation of jealousy; "we are to be married as soon as he gets promotion. How can you dare to come here, having received stolen goods as evidence, and wrong your wife and insult me by your groundless suspicions and accusations?"

He was shaken by my earnestness, by the evident reality of my anger, and presently he listened to me calmly while I told him how matters really stood between Donald and ourselves.

After a time he asked me if there was

any prospect of Harty coming home to him, and I, with the memory of the words she had just spoken ringing in my ears, was obliged to crush out his falteringly expressed question. Then, in order to turn the conversation into a less painful channel, I began pressing him to tell me how the lost likeness had come into his possession.

"Mrs. Spalding handed it to me," he said ; and I exclaimed,

"The atrocious woman ! has she played the spy in our household ?"

"Mrs. Spalding is free and at mischief, I'm afraid," he answered, seriously. "She promised me some time since that she would leave the country, and not try to work further mischief and misery ; but it's not in her nature to be at peace, and so now, though I firmly believe that every particle of the love she once had for me has vanished,

still she holds to her resolution of eventually becoming my wife by fair means or foul. It is she who has been striving to implant suspicions of Harty's honour in my heart, hoping that I should divorce Harty and marry her."

"But how did she get the likeness?" I urged, perseveringly.

"She took it herself off your drawing-room table one evening when Harty and you were strolling in the garden; it is she who has kept such accurate count of Mr. Stuart's visits—"

"What a fiend she must be," I interrupted, and he, with the pardonable weakness of a man who felt that the fiendishness had been developed by love for himself, strove to deprecate my disgust and wrath and extenuate her conduct.

He stayed for a long time, evidently

hoping that Harty would relent and come and speak to him, and though I knew I should rouse her anger by doing so, I went and pleaded his cause, and besought her as he said, to give him one more trial.

But she was inexorable and reviled me for the attempt, telling me that I was grown arrogant and idiotic by reason of the unexpected honour which Donald Stuart had done me, and altogether so wounded and astonished me that I went down to report the result of my intercession to Mr. Malling with a strong feeling of partizanship for him upon me.

Gradually, as Harty's nervous flutter of indignation about her husband's visit toned down, she began to question me as to what he had said, and showed an especial interest in that part of our conversation which related to the object of stealing the likeness and the manner in which the theft had been accomplished.

"Do you know I should immensely like to become acquainted with that Mrs. Spalding," she said. "You say she's as lovely as a woman can be, and she must be clever to have done all she has for the sake of carrying her point."

"Harty, how can you bring yourself to speak in such a way? How can you tolerate the idea of a woman who has endeavoured so vilely to separate you from your husband?"

"I should tolerate the idea of her with even more perfect equanimity if she had succeeded in separating me from my husband," she laughed. "Come, Laura, be reasonable. You must acknowledge that I have had more than enough of Mr. Malling. I would have been a good enduring wife to him all the days of my life if he had not crushed me. Now I hate him so that I would gladly hail any means of freeing my-

self from him. I can't regard Mrs. Spalding as an enemy, and I repeat I should like to know her."

I wrote all these matters in detail to Donald, and had the satisfaction of hearing from him in reply that he thought it an awful pity that Providence took away the husbands who are loved and needed, and left those who were the banes of their unhappy wives' lives.

"On the whole," he said, "I think Harty right in keeping her freedom now she has got it, and we must all live in the hope of Mr. Malling seeing the propriety and expediency of before long leaving a world which he has made a howling wilderness to so many."

I did not like the tone of this remark. It was flippant and unlike Donald, I told myself. But Harty, when I read it to her,

looked more pleased and animated than I had seen her for some time.

“Read it again—read it again,” she said, with evident unsuppressed interest. “How exactly Donald and I feel about the hateful man. Donald *is* so sympathetic; it ought to make an angel of any woman the prospect *you* have before you, Laura, of going through life with him.”

“It’s almost a pity you didn’t arrive at this conclusion about Donald before you married, and he engaged himself to me,” I replied, feeling a little nettled at this warm eulogium on my lover, and being at the same time disgusted with myself for admitting the feeling for a moment.

“Ah ! yes,” she sighed, I was a foolish girl, and I repent my folly bitterly now that I am a woman ; but I thought in sacrificing love and inclination to duty and prudence

that I must be doing the right thing. Oh, dear! if I had only been more selfish, and cared for myself instead of for my family, *what* a happy woman I might have been," she said, piteously, as if the world generally had been hard to her and I out of all that world the hardest.

"Harty, it's no use making lament over the inevitable," I began, deprecatingly; but she interrupted me fiercely.

"Inevitable is it that I am to be a wretched woman—an injured, betrayed, deserted wife all my life? I don't believe it. Fate will be kinder to me than my own sister, who would mercilessly see me consigned to that tyrant's clutches. Fate *will* free me!"

She spoke the words with such wild passionate vehemence that they carried conviction with them to my ears, and consequently I think I was less surprised than

she was when, a few weeks after, we got the tidings of Mr. Malling's sudden death from heart disease.

Very soon after her husband's death—indecently soon, I thought, though he had been harsh and bitter—Harty got acquainted with Mrs. Spalding and fell into habits of intimacy with her

Oddly enough the lovely woman with the warped mind hated *me* much more than she did my fair sister, who had been her successful rival. There was something in Harty's capricious nature that was sympathetic to Mrs. Spalding, and so at last, feeling that Harty could get on now better without me than with me, I went back to my father's house, there to await the time when Donald should be able to take me to one of my own.

Months passed by, and at last Harty, who had been left wealthy by her husband's will,

wrote to tell us that "she and her friend, Mrs. Spalding, would visit us before they went abroad for a time, if we could have them." Of course we were glad to have Harty, but I think, as a family, we disliked and revolted against the alliance my sister had made with the woman whose love and hate had done so much damage. However, they came together, and as a family I must admit that we were all carried away by Mrs. Spalding's beauty and grace and charms.

She blamed herself so frankly for all that had been. She spoke with such pitiful tenderness of her neglected youth, her happy marriage, the likeness between the cousins, and the terrible mental affliction which had been her portion for a time.

"I lost all knowledge of right and wrong and simply tried to do what pleased me—wasn't it awful?" she would say to my

mother and to me, pathetically; and we would both pity her and hope that something bright might be in store for her.

"I dread meeting this austere lover of yours, Miss Luttrell," she said to me the day we expected Donald down. "Harty tells me that he is of an unforgiving temperament and that I shall get scant mercy at his hands."

"*You* never wronged him," I said, looking suspiciously at the syren; "and as for Harty, she has very little to complain of at his hands, I should imagine."

"She seems to think, though, that there's something he can't forgive her," Mrs. Spalding breathed, softly, "and as he is going to be her brother it is very, very, very sad for her. She tells me that there is always an air of reserve in their intercourse, and that she does not like to try to

win him a softer mood for fear of arousing your jealousy ; really, if I were in your place, Miss Luttrell, I would exorcise the demon of jealousy—it is not worthy of you.”

“ And if I were in your place I would not offer unsolicited advice to a woman who distrusts you,” I answered, aggressively, for her air of intimacy with Harty, and of reprobation about Donald, irritated me unaccountably.

“ You distrust me ! ” she said, reproachfully. “ Ah ! what a thorough *woman* you are. Because I loved one man not wisely, but too well, you are ready to find me guilty of every kind of enormity. Your sister has more reason to judge me harshly than you have. Yet *she* trusts me. But then she has a weaker sweeter nature than yours ; she responds to sympathy and kindness unhesitatingly, whereas you would pause

to look for a possible motive for either being shown."

I longed to tell her that her sympathy for Harty was as false as were her arguments generally, but I could not do it. The woman enveloped me in a moral fog and choked me. I distrusted her thoroughly, and felt, with the unanswerable force of conviction, that events would justify me in that distrust. My taste revolted against the coarse candour with which she proclaimed her mad and evanescent passion for Mr. Malling—a man whom she could now refer to lightly, with a half-contemptuous smile.

I *knew* that she hated me with an unforgiving hate for having unearthed her on that dismal night, and for having detected that method in her madness which caused him to first suspect and finally despise her. And yet for all these things, and for all

the force with which I felt them, I could find no words in which to express my full knowledge and abhorrence of her and her baneful beauty.

As I reflect on these things now, I am almost inclined to admit that I have paid a just penalty, and been but rightly served in all that has befallen me, for that want of readiness, or cowardice, which kept me tongue-tied then.

Just after this brief passage of arms with Mrs. Spalding, Donald Stuart came, and my foolish pride was in arms at once, urging me to show the woman I detested that no small jealousy of my sister assailed my soul, in spite of that sister's far superior loveliness.

Donald's visit was understood to be paid for the purpose of making arrangements for our marriage. But day after day passed and no allusion was made to those business

details which had to be gone into between my father and my lover. Harty, who had come out of the furnace of affliction most becomingly, was naturally the object of greatest importance in the household. Her beauty and her wealth, and the magnanimity of her nature in being friendly with the woman who had striven to rival her with her husband, were constant themes with my father, who did most unfeignedly rejoice in the child who could never cost him another penny. And so it came about that Harty always easily monopolised one or other of the men, and so rendered a discussion on business matters impossible between them.

And I meanwhile foolishly affected to be engrossed with household duties, and to be perfectly satisfied and happy about the way in which things worked.

One day I came into the morning-room

and found Donald reading what at first glance looked to me like a long letter. He seemed disturbed and distressed, and fancying that it was some official worry, I went up to him and said,

“Not a reminder from the office that your services are due, I hope, Donald dear,” and as he replied, “No—you may read it if you like,” I saw that it was a poem, having for its title the very expression I had used about the possible official mission —“A Reminder.”

I took the paper from him and read the following in my sister Harty’s writing—

“No tender words of gentle force  
Can win you back to me ;  
No stabbing pang of late remorse  
Assails that heart so free :  
The sunniest glance that eyes can give  
Smiles back from yours to mine ;  
The reign of love is o’er—I live  
To know I am not thine !

My wistful eyes in vain appeal  
For love that lives no more ;  
My sorrowing heart can only feel  
That life's best light is o'er.

Yet *still* my tender words ring on—  
Still gentlest force essays  
To win you to look back upon  
That dream of bygone days :  
When you were all the world to me,  
I still a prize unwon.  
God's mercy should have let me die  
Before that day was done,  
Or let me live to show how strong  
A woman's love could be,  
To make you hers by chains of ' wrong '  
If ' right ' would leave you free.

But I have failed to bind the chain—  
Have failed to weave the spell—  
Have learnt to know that once again  
The old tale I must tell—  
The old sad sweetly bitter tale  
Of love too lightly given,  
The old romantic sneering wail  
At chains too lightly riven :  
Yet still my tender words ring on—  
Still gentlest force essays  
To win you to look back upon  
That dream of bygone days."

I read them through and handed them back to him without a word.

"You don't like them?" he asked, irritably.

"I don't like them; both the manner and the matter are bad according to my idea, and I'm at a loss to conceive why my sister Harty should have copied them out for your benefit."

"Copied them! why they are original," he replied, quickly, "and I think they show true tenderness as well as real poetic feeling."

"If they are original they're not Harty's. She never wrote a line of poetry in her life," I said, coldly, for his enthusiasm annoyed me, and I was alarmed at I knew not what.

"You have got into an unbecoming habit of looking down on your sister mentally," he said, quickly. "Because a woman is a

beauty it doesn't necessarily follow that she is a fool."

"Nor does it necessarily follow that because a woman is plain she is also blind," I retorted, struggling hard to keep calm under the sure conviction that the slightest show of temper on my part would crack the slender chain that bound him to me.

"I think at least that you must be blind if you fail to see that they are pretty," he said, carelessly folding them up and putting them in his pocket.

"They 'go' easily enough, I'm prepared to admit," I said, foolishly arguing about a matter of sentiment, "but that sort of thing runs off by the yard. It's the easiest of all metres, for it so exactly suits the commonplace—"

"I like such commonplaces," he inter-

rupted, curtly, I thought; and, stung to desperation, I said,

“And if you like them, Harty is altogether wrong to address them to you; but I still adhere to my first opinion, and decline to believe that the verses are her own.”

“I estimate Harty more correctly than you do, I fancy, and I quite believe her capable of expressing herself harmoniously and powerfully when her deeper feelings are aroused.”

“Donald!” I exclaimed, reproachfully; “if you have played a double part and roused deeper feelings in my sister’s heart than she ought to have for her future brother, tell me so now and I will free you. My humiliation cannot be essential to her triumph and happiness—”

I stopped, choked by sobs, and he stood with clouded brow and confused mien be-

fore me, unable or unwilling to offer me the slightest help or comfort.

“Are you *both* traitors to me?” I cried, wounded beyond placid endurance by his obstinate silence. Then he lifted his head haughtily enough, and answered me—

“Don’t blame your sister; let all your wrath fall on me. I deserve it, but she does not. She has never uttered a word to me that you and all the world might not hear.”

“She has said enough, and more than enough in those verses,” I interposed.

“A moment ago you contended that they were not her own. You are inconsistent, Laura.”

“She wishes you to think them hers, and you have fallen into the trap her flattery has laid for you. But there is some other influence against me besides Harty’s. My

own sister could not have been so base as to stab me in the back if some other hand had not placed the dagger in hers and directed the blow. Donald, we are both the victims of a plot. Harty neither hates me nor loves you, as those verses would imply. But if your heart has wavered from me I will not strive to recapture it by force."

"It is better that I accept your dismissal quietly for all our sakes. Forgive me, and be an affectionate sister to me," he said, deprecatingly, and I hid the pain I felt and gave him my hand and the promise he required, and knew that *my* life dream was over.

"What's the matter, Laura?" Harty said, coming into my room about an hour after this with a half-amused, half-anxious look in her eyes.

During that hour I had nerved myself to

bear the wound without wincing, and told myself the truth. Donald's *liking* for me had never been love, and even the liking had faded.

So I answered Harty's question steadily enough.

"Donald and I have come to the conclusion that he made a mistake and so we are friends only, not lovers, from this day forth."

"What a *goose* Donald is!" she said in a vexed tone.

"Then it's you who have made him one, Harty," I said, indignantly, and she crimsoned as she replied,

"You mean those foolish verses have done the mischief! Oh! Laura, *dear*, I only gave them to him in fun. I never thought for a moment that he would take them in earnest and give you up for any

nonsense of the kind. Come down straight and I'll make it all right between you."

"Plead for him to try and like me a little, just enough to marry me and make me wretched?" I asked sadly. "No—no, Harty, *you* have played with fire and *I* am to be burnt. You can only make it straight with Donald by marrying him yourself."

She laughed out at this, as if the idea was altogether too absurd.

"Why the verses, such as they are, are not even my own," she protested. "He must be a goose to believe that I should have written such an appeal in serious earnest. Besides, I have had enough of being a bondswoman."

"Why did you do it? What made you play so false a part to him and to me?" I asked, in angry pain.

"Oh! Laura, really I was only in fun,"

she said, humbly kneeling down before me and drawing me into her arms. "Wretch that I am to have been led on to cost you such pain. I only did it because Mrs. Spalding said you were so ridiculously elated about your engagement that it would be a good joke to show you that Donald was like every other man—open to flattery. I never meant it to go so far, nor did she."

"Yes, she did," I said, bitterly. "She is my enemy, and yours too, Harty, for she has striven to sow distrust and dissension between us, and Donald will be the victim—"

"Of his own silly vanity, if he's a victim at all," Harty cried. "I will go to him, if you won't, and cry *mea culpa!* and explain to him how he has been tricked and trifled with. He shall learn to discern the false

from the true, for though I'm weak, Laura, I'm not wicked."

She was in earnest now—my own loving sister again ; but I would not let her go to Donald on my behalf.

"The memory of this would always rise up between us," I said. "Better anything than to be a lightly-loved wife. I'm sure of that, Harty."

"At least he shall know that I didn't write the verses—they are Mrs. Spalding's," Harty said meditatively. "He shall *not* think that I want the past restored, or old feelings revived, or any nonsense of that kind. He and you shall marry and I'll dance blithely at your wedding—now let me go to him."

She left me before I could interpose to stop her, and, as I found afterwards, sought Donald in all loyalty, and in all honesty told

him the truth somewhat bluntly. But, though her plain straightforward avowal of indifference checked his proclamation of the transfer of his affections from me to her, he did not express any claim to resume the relations which had been so rudely and unexpectedly broken off with me.

He went away that day, leaving me to offer what explanation I pleased of the rupture between us to my father and mother. As he was about to step into Harty's pony carriage to be driven to the station, Mrs. Spalding started up, saying, reproachfully,

"Poor fellow! I can't bear to see him sent away alone as if he was in disgrace; he has done nothing to deserve it from *you* at least, Harty. I shall go to the station with him and try to cheer him up."

Harty and I looked at one another as she said this, and I think we both saw the be-

ginning of the end in that move of Mrs. Spalding's. But we did not say a word, for it was worse than useless to discuss what was inevitable we both felt. Moreover, I dreaded exciting the curiosity of my father and mother, for my heart was too sick and sore at the time to be able to bear any mention of Donald, or speculations as to why he had done or left undone anything.

But Harty's manner to her pseudo friend changed so from that day that we were not surprised when Mrs. Spalding announced her intention of leaving us within the week.

She took a gay unconcerned leave of us, and fired this parting shot at me—

“Good-bye, Miss Luttrell. You certainly may claim all the merit of having invented me, for if your love of intrigue hadn't led to my discovery I should probably still be

steeped in that atmosphere of inert hopelessness in which you found me. To you is unquestionably due the credit of having given a fresh impetus to my chequered career."

"Heartless and insolent! How could I have been taken in for an hour by that woman? May we never hear of her again," Harty said, when she was gone.

"Ah! but we shall hear of her again," I replied, prophetically.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Then, if love's first ideal now grows wan,  
And thou wilt love again—again love me!  
For what I am—no hero, but a man  
Still loving thee."

WE heard of our brilliant, beautiful, bewildering evil genius sooner than we had anticipated. Harty and I had just come home from a month's trip on the Continent, taken in the cause of forgetfulness. Forgetfulness rewarded me after the manner of the majority of the "causes" I have espoused in life—namely, refused to have anything to do with me. Accordingly I came back to England full of anxiety and im-

patience—full of anxiety and impatience for tidings of Donald Stuart.

I had not long to wait for them. Lady Doynethorpe was one of our earliest visitors.

“I hardly like to tell you,” she began, when she had given us both a very warm welcome, “it seems almost too ridiculous to come to you two girls with such a story as I have to tell, still I must tell it.”

We, both feeling that it was about Donald, implored her to tell it.

“I can’t bear having things ‘broken’ to myself, so I’ll just blurt out the whole story at once. Donald Stuart is going to be married, and to whom do you think?”

I pressed my lips together and *would not* guess that arch-traitress who had tricked us all. But Harty was not so reticent.

“You surely are not going to tell us that

it's to Mrs. Spalding?" she said, and Lady Doynethorpe answered,

"Yes, I grieve to say you have guessed rightly, it is to Mrs. Spalding. How has she sapped his judgment and stifled his conscience?"

"You use hard words," I said as collectedly as I could. "She is a beautiful woman, and a designing one. She has cast a glamour over him, but, if it lasts, she may make him happy."

"Don't try to speak generously about it," Harty exclaimed, impatiently. "I hope the glamour will fade away directly the marriage knot is tied, and that the depravity of her nature will manifest itself to him so plainly that he'll be miserable for the rest of his life."

But I could not bring myself to endorse Harty's hopes, for I loved Donald Stuart still.

It seemed like the very refinement of cruelty, though, when I received an invitation, together with Harty to be present at the wedding. Of course the invitation came from the lady, but, "Donald must be cognisant of it," I thought, "and perhaps wishes that my weakness may be revealed to everybody."

This was merely the ungenerous thought of a moment. I blotted it out directly by making all I could of Donald's honour and nobility. "Because he has failed me it is no reason that he should be false to his better self," I said. And so I determined that I would, if he wished it, go and see him married.

The day came and the hour, and Harty and I took our places among the guests who were assembled to witness the marriage of Mrs. Spalding with Donald Stuart. I had

strung myself up to the pitch of requisite calmness, and when the bridegroom took his place close to me and awaited the advent of the bride, there was not an individual in the group who trembled less than I did—outwardly. It *did* give me a thrill of pleasure, though, to see that he was visibly shocked and astonished to observe Harty and me in the circle of his future wife's friends.

Minutes fled, and every one grew fidgety as no bride appeared. A whisper went round the circle, and presently one of her own friends crossed over and spoke to Donald, who nodded his head in impatient acquiescence. Then the friend went out to see what had become of the lagging lady, and again we set ourselves to wait as well as we could.

At length, just as it seemed to everybody absurd to wait any longer, the messenger



came back out of breath, incoherent, but still full of the delightful consciousness of being the cynosure of all eyes.

“I can hardly bring myself to tell you,” he began, addressing Donald, who had advanced quietly to meet him, “but Mrs. Spalding left her home late last night and nothing has been heard of her since. Perhaps this note may throw some light on—”

Donald took the extended note before the panting friend could say another word, and read—what I do not know. Suffice it to say that when he had glanced through the contents of the epistle he turned to us quietly.

“I am sorry that you should have been disappointed of the spectacle of a man making a fool of himself, which you came to see. Perhaps, though, the fact of his being made a fool of by a woman may amuse



you more." And with that he bowed to us and walked away, and once more I thought that I had seen the last of Donald Stuart.

"I can't help feeling a little tiny wee bit gratified," Harty said to me, as we drove back to our hotel. "After having been loved by such women as ourselves it does seem as if he were only rightly served in being thrown over and publicly snubbed and made a laughing-stock of by the lower nature to which he has declined."

"I don't think I feel a bit gratified," I replied, with a few tears of compassion both for him and for myself choking my utterance.

"I hope you'll never be pitiful enough to love him and forgive him, and take him after all?" Harty interrogated, sharply, and I muttered something to the effect that



had "put all idle thoughts of love away from me for ever."

"I am glad of that," Harty said, yawning, "and I must say I think it only sensible and proper of you. For English family life to be perfect there should always be a dear old-maid aunt in the domestic circle; as I have married you are naturally cast for the part of spinster. What a relief it must be to you to feel that there are no conflicting claims to interfere with your devotion to the interests and comfort of papa, mamma, and myself."

"I am afraid I am very selfish, Harty," I said, meekly; "I don't quite seem to rejoice in the prospect yet."

However, Time is a great physician, and I gradually came to the conclusion that time was not made up entirely of Donald Stuart and disappointed love. Harty

always gave me plenty of employment, for she soon forgot her resolve to live the remainder of her life in blissful widowhood, and was perpetually in an entanglement of some sort or another with her numerous lovers. And when at length she married again, and in due course of time made me an aunt, it seemed as if the just debt of gratitude due from me to her for having done so could never be properly paid.

“I shall let you make *all* baby’s little frocks and pelisses for him, Laura. You shall have the pleasure of being able to say that you provided him entirely with his short clothes,” the proud and happy mother (who wasn’t fond of needlework herself) would say to me, and I, recognising perfectly the happiness and serenity there is in usefulness, would smile and

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accept the situation of head-sempstress to Master Baby with becoming humility.

“What blessings my children are to you, Laura,” she would say sometimes. “They never leave you an idle moment. After all, out of evil comes good. If that horrid Mrs. Spalding hadn’t bamboozled Donald so completely you wouldn’t have had half the time to bestow upon your pets that you have now.”

In fact, Harty was so thoroughly resigned to my fate and was so eloquent in putting all the advantages she had conferred upon me by marrying happily and having lovely children, before me, that I felt very guilty indeed when one day Donald Stuart came to disturb the even tenour of our lives.

He put the case to me again—that old “case” in which I had been interested

principally, and which, to my bitter sorrow, I had so completely lost.

"What fools we all were some years ago, Laura," he said to me, quietly—"I to want to leave you for a will-of-the-wisp, and you to give me up so readily. We shouldn't be such weather-cocks now—should we?"

"I daresay we are both more sensible in many things than we were then," I said, demurely.

"No doubt we are, and therefore much more likely to make each other happy than we were in our salad days," he answered. "Tell me, Laura, shall we be wise and let the dead past bury its dead, and make a new compact that shall have the advantage over the old one of being reasonable instead of romantic? Perhaps I am more worthy of you now than I was in those



old days when you made a hero of me."

"Perhaps you are," I said, subduing my inclination to be sentimental.

"At any rate, if the poetry of life is over for us we may still live some very happy prose together," he said, and with that assurance I was quite content. In fact, he made this second love to me in the spirit though not in the words which Owen Meredith uses in his "Last Remonstrance."

"Then, if love's first ideal now grows wan,  
And thou wilt love again—again love me  
For what I am—no hero, but a man  
Still loving thee."

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In the after years, when time in its flight had carried with it the humiliation to which Mrs. Spalding had subjected Donald, and

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when he confidently realised that the past held no fault of waywardness uncondoned by myself, he made the confession that in his weak and vacillating days he had been thrown into the society of the woman who had subsequently wrought such ill amongst us—the acquaintance having been made during his voyage home from New York, to which city he had had occasion to pay a brief visit.

Knowing nothing of her antecedents, and believing her to be, as she represented, a widow, on her way to England for the purpose of settling some business matters connected with her late husband's estate, Donald succumbed to the delicious glamour she had cast over him during that intercourse; and when, by the force of circumstances, they were again thrown together, the remembrance of their former association

came to his mind with irresistible force and rendered him once more an easy prey.

Of course Donald had required an explanation of the circumstances which had given rise to the gossip current in the neighbourhood anent the mysterious doings of the supposed Mr. and Mrs. Spalding at Marshlands, and had received for answer that her husband had been the owner of the grim old mansion, but his extravagant propensities had obliged him to sell the property to his cousin, Mr. Malling, who had, however, consented to gratify a whim of Mrs. Spalding that she should take up her residence there pending a settlement of her affairs; and surmise alone was responsible for fastening upon Mr. Malling the name of her late husband, Mr. Spalding, and the visits he paid to the mansion being necessarily rare, owing to

his connection with the Doynethorpe estate, the mystery attending him could therefore be accounted for.

As no tidings ever reached us respecting the whereabouts or the doings of Mrs. Spalding since her note was placed in the hands of Donald on the memorable occasion when the wedding party were waiting for the bride who never came, and as the sudden death of Mr. Malling precluded any elucidation he might have been able to give, we were forced to draw our own conclusions as to the truth or falsity of Mrs. Spalding's explanations.

Of one thing, however, we were certain—that no external disturbing influence could ever mar the deep reciprocal love that existed between Donald and myself. As for Harty, the rebound from the bondage of her first marriage to the absolute freedom

she enjoyed in her second one, was a sufficient evidence that in her estimation, at least, she had, after all, succeeded in securing "A Good Settlement."



# **BLUE EYES AND GOLDEN HAIR.**

**IN SIX CHAPTERS.**



# BLUE EYES AND GOLDEN HAIR.



## CHAPTER I.

A soft western wind is breathing rapturously over everything, extracting as it passes the full sweetness from the myriad flowers of June. At the summit of the slope of the hill-pasture there is a gate, dividing it from the adjoining wood. In front of this gate there is stretched a huge tawny mastiff, half sleeping, only refraining from doing so wholly out of a sense of duty towards his young mistress, who is perched on the gate-post above him. Her lap is full of flowers—of hair-grasses and blue-bells,

wild geraniums, and St. John's Wort, poppies and celandine. But amidst all these bright beautiful flowers of June there is not one so blue as her eyes, not one so golden as her hair. A huge bouquet, a mass of harmoniously - blended tints, is growing rapidly in her skilful hands, and she is perfectly absorbed in her pretty task. Presently she is startled and interrupted by a voice, which says,

“Will you be good enough to make that horrible dog of yours move, Miss Eldon?”

“With pleasure. Tartar dear, get up,” the girl answers, bowing her head courteously towards a large lady, who is standing close by, breathing hard, partly with annoyance at the dog being in her path, and partly with the exertion of having breasted the hill. The obedient dog rises unwillingly enough; the lady has a tussle with the

gate, and failing to open it, is fain to have recourse again to Miss Eldon.

“Do you think you could manage this for me? It’s so stiff, I can’t move it.”

“I’ll try,” the girl says, springing lightly down and swinging the gate open in a moment. She stands back in an attitude of utter unconcern for the lady to pass through, but rather to her surprise Mrs. Granville pauses, puts out her hand in a half-hearted kind of way, and says,

“I am sorry to have disturbed you; your occupation is a very pretty and pleasing one. But, my dear Miss Eldon, *don’t* you think you could find something better to do with your time than to spend it in wandering about with a nasty dog, and in gathering wild flowers?”

The girl listens to this exordium with the sweetest patience and the sunniest smile

that girlhood has ever expressed. At its conclusion she remounts her gate-post, and from that vantage-ground she speaks :

“You are very kind to trouble yourself about the disposition of my time. If you will shut the gate, Tartar can lie down again.”

Mrs. Granville does not shut the gate; she bangs it, and walks away without a word of farewell to the young lady who is seated on its post. Mrs. Granville is the wife of the Squire of the parish, the greatest landowner and richest commoner in the county. She has ridden rough-shod over the necks of all who have come in contact with her locally, up to the period of Daisy Eldon marking an epoch in local life. It is a serious crumple in Mrs. Granville's rose-leaf in these days that Daisy Eldon should have put, not so much a full-

stop to her triumphant career, as a note of interrogation as to why she should pursue it.

These are glebe-lands over which Mrs. Granville is passing now, and so she cannot order Daisy, the rector's daughter, off them. But the "time will come, my young lady, the time will come, when you'll be sorry that you didn't show me a little more attention," she thinks, as she gets herself out of the sunny fields into her own well-kept shady gardens.

Luncheon is on the table by the time Mrs. Granville gets home, and her husband is there to partake of it with her.

"You look tired, my dear," he says, putting his perception of her hot flustered appearance into the most agreeable form of words his complacent mind can conceive.

"Tired! I should think so!" she re-

torts; and then she goes on garrulously to state that she has been on a mission of mercy to the village among "her poor" this morning, and that she has had a serious annoyance in coming home through the glebe-path.

"It seems that Daisy opened the gate for you," her husband expostulates. "She can't help the latches being in bad order, you know."

Mr. Granville has a human weakness for Daisy's beauty and goodness; her sweet blue eyes and her mastiff Tartar are not hateful to him as they are to his wife. Therefore he nerves himself to the task of offering this faint apology for her; but the fact of his doing so rouses his wife's wrath.

"How can you defend such idleness and wicked neglect, Mr. Granville! The girl had no business there at that time of day,

and the gate-latch ought to be mended. Her father is a negligent thriftless man, and her mother is not one bit better. If they kept their children at home and made them useful, perhaps they would be able to afford to mend their gates. I blushed, I positively blushed, this morning when I thought of a woman—a mother—allowing her daughter to fritter away her time as Mrs. Eldon allows Daisy to fritter hers away. The girl will be a byword and a scorn to the neighbourhood. Fancy her sitting at twelve in the morning on a gate-post, with a dog!"

"She might have done worse, and sat there with a man," Mr. Granville chuckles; but the ill-timed frivolity simply drives Mrs. Granville to do more doughty deeds against the offending Daisy.

"I don't like joking about serious matters," she says severely, "and even

you will admit that the Eldons' case is a very serious one. They are positively not living like gentlepeople. How can *one* servant do the work of that huge house for that huge family? And they owe money to every tradesman in the neighbourhood."

"I pity them with my whole heart," Mr. Granville says, with emotion; "and I'd gladly pull in for a year or too, and pay off all Eldon's liabilities, if he would only let me. It breaks my heart when I think of the way in which he works himself to death in the parish, and then of the home he has to go to. A scholar and gentleman, a man of culture and refinement, to have come to this—that he is scouted by a set of people who ought to feel honoured by his knowing them! It breaks my heart."

"If he is a scholar, why doesn't he turn

his scholarship to account? If he is a gentleman, why doesn't he pay his debts as a gentleman? I should. If he has refinement and culture, why does he live in all that wretched muddle and misery that they do live in at the rectory? My dear John, depend upon it, that if he were all you say he is, he wouldn't be in the plight he is in now."

Mrs. Granville is so pleased with her own rhetoric that she does not require any answer from her husband, and he is equally well pleased at not being required to make one. His partisanship for Mr. Eldon is of the flimsiest order after all; it shrivels up and becomes mere nothingness whenever her tongue of flame shoots out at it.

Meanwhile Daisy has descended from her gate-post and gone home. The glebe-fields are on the other side of the village from the

rectory. And so it comes about that Daisy passes through the village streets just at that noontide hour when all business is suspended, and the inhabitants are at liberty to disport themselves on their respective thresholds. The butcher fronts her on his door-step with a gory white apron on, and as she stops for Tartar to receive his customary tribute in the shape of a bit of paunch, she finds that well-known appalling red and greasy-looking book slipped into her hand.

“I’ve had no settlement for a many months, Miss Daisy,” the man says apologetically. “If you could get your pa to attend to it, I should be that obliged to you—”

He stops abruptly, checked in his righteous endeavour to get his own by the supreme beauty and the misery expressed

in Daisy's young face as she bends it listeningly towards him. Her slim hand has closed on the terrible book, or he would take it from her and beg her "not to trouble herself about it." As it is, he feels as if he had boxed with a lamb or wrestled with a kitten when she says,

"I'll show it to papa, Mr. Grimes—not that showing it will do much good, I fear. It's terrible that you should have to go without your money. Would you like to have Tartar?"

The tears spring into the bluest eyes that have ever opened upon the world as she says this, for in offering Tartar she makes the grandest voluntary self-sacrifice that it is in her power to make, or in her imagination to conceive. Daisy and Tartar have been friends and comrades since the puppyhood of the latter, six years ago, and Daisy

shrinks from meeting Tartar's eyes now as she offers him to a butcher in payment of her father's bill.

"I wouldn't take Tartar from you, Miss Daisy—no, not if I was sure I should never see a penny of your pa's money," Grimes says ecstatically; and Tartar, who knows that he is being discussed, expresses his satisfaction at the turn the conversation has taken by frowning heavily, slobbering, and vigorously wagging his large plump tail. That he incidently helps himself to a loin-chop off the open shop-board as Grimes retires into his emporium, and Daisy pursues her homeward path, is nothing to Tartar's discredit. He comes of a race who avowedly "take whene'er they have the power;" and as their power is vast, it is an act of grace on the part of this scion of the stock that he contents



himself with one chop on this occasion, instead of taking the run of his teeth on a prime young lamb that is hanging up well within his reach.

"You wicked thief, you dear unprincipled old dog!" Daisy says, as he trots up to her side just as she enters the ill-kept rectory grounds, "isn't it a dreadful thing to need food and raiment, Tartar, when one can't pay for either? O Tartar, Tartar, I've no business to enjoy the sun and flowers and you in idleness, while all the others are working."

She does not loiter along sentimentally as she says this to her dog. She runs briskly up the drive, taking especially keen note as she goes of the weeds that relieve its surface. "How they do flourish and grow apace!" she remarks to herself and to Tartar. "It's very odd that the same soil

and form of culture shouldn't suit the flowers, that agrees so wonderfully well with the constitution of the weeds."

The house itself is a pleasant-enough object at this time of the year. It is a long, low, rambling, old two-storied building, with latticed windows, and a verandah running round the front and one end of it. The lattice windows glimmer out from amidst masses of foliage now, and the pillars of the verandah are wreathed with cluster roses, with jasmine and clematis and ivy-leafed geraniums. Outside the house there is an atmosphere of sweetness and refinement that is very congenial to Daisy. We shall see presently how it is over the threshold. The porch-door is open, and she passes into the hall, which runs through to the back of the house, where another door gives upon the croquet-lawn.

This is also open, and through it Daisy sees five or six of her brothers and sisters knocking the balls about. She is about to join them when her mother's voice arrests her, and Daisy turns into the dining-room, where a graceful harassed-looking woman is striving to make an obtuse servant understand the directions given for the hundredth time as to the arrangement of the table.

"Mamma dear, don't exert yourself. I ought to have been in before to see to all this; but I relied on one of the others helping you," Daisy says apologetically.

Daisy has not yet learnt the lesson which her younger sisters are assiduously endeavouring to teach her—that it is worse than vain on her part to rely upon them to relieve their overstrained mother in any household emergency. They are affectionate, unselfish, and willing enough to

“help mamma” in the abstract. But they are young, full of bright untamed spirits, and happily indifferent as yet to the daily round of confusion which is run in the household. Daisy, the eldest daughter and flower of as fine-looking a flock as there is in the county, is also, as Mrs. Eldon declares emphatically, “her mother’s right hand.” And Daisy is more than this. She is chief counsellor in all family complications, chief sympathiser in all family sorrows, chief smoother of all family difficulties. Daisy’s clear blue eyes always beam hopeful promise of assistance upon her mother; and in some way or other the promise is always fulfilled.

Twenty-one years ago, when the Rev. Thomas Eldon married Miss Bertram, prognostications had been uttered freely as to the match being the making of him. The

Bertrams were a power in the county, and it was quite an accepted fact that they would in time do "something very good" for the husband of the daughter of their house. But time passed on; Mrs. Eldon's brother ascended the throne in place of his father, and Mr. Eldon still struggled on at Burnsleigh on three hundred and fifty pounds a year.

This income had been sufficient, and but barely sufficient, in the days when their family had been smaller and younger. But now, with eight daughters and two sons, it barely enables them to live at all. The parish is large, struggling, and poor, and the priest of it cannot shut his eyes to the needs, or steel his heart to the distress, of those who are even worse off than himself. He does "what he can," everybody admits; and little as that something is, it still seriously

cripples his very small resources. There are times when Mrs. Eldon thinks with something like bitterness of the manner of life which is lived by her kith and kin over at Bertram Court, and of the solitary sumptuous state which her only sister, Miss Bertram, keeps in London. Long ago this lady reaped the reward of years of interested devotion to a wealthy old uncle by being left his sole heiress. From which time she has kept aloof considerably from her sister and her sister's family, out of a wholesome dread she has that "they may think that she ought to do something for them." Miss Bertram has never been tempted to commit the folly of making a love-match herself. Naturally she is rather severe on those who not only have been guilty of the enormity, but who, having failed in correctly counting the cost of it, stretch forth appealing hands to others



who have been wiser in their generation for aid and succour. Mrs. Eldon has never asked her rich unmarried sister for so much as one of the crumbs that fall from the latter's well-ordered and plenteous table. But still that sister cannot quite stultify her conscience, nor can she utterly forget that they are daughters of one house, and loved each other well when they were little children. Mrs. Eldon's poverty and generally overweighted condition is a sore trial to Miss Bertram ; so she thinks as little about it as she possibly can, and tries to persuade herself that her callousness to their condition is merely a just reminder to her brother-in-law and sister of their extreme imprudence in having brought themselves and their children to this pass. If Mr. Eldon would make his name ring as a Broad-Church theologian, or as an eloquent and heart-stirring

expounder of Evangelical traditions, Miss Bertram would feel something like sisterly affection for his wife. But he is absolutely unknown and unimportant beyond the boundaries of his own parish. He is merely a hard-working, good, conscientious, highly-educated gentleman, and as such he does not redound to Miss Bertram's credit in any way in her London set.

But latterly Miss Bertram has begun to take an interest in Daisy—an interest that does not show itself in doing anything definitely good for the girl, but that is eager to collect all the information that can be got about her. For two or three months of the London season Mrs. Granville occupies the adjoining house to that in which Miss Bertram holds solitary state in Wimpole Street; and there is a good deal of intercourse of the severely social order between



the two ladies. That is to say, they give each other the tips of their fingers when the exigencies of society thrust them together, and they dine at each other's houses two or three times, and wag their heads at each other when they meet in the Park, and are altogether quite "on terms." It is quite pleasant to Mrs. Granville, who was a girl in the same county set with the 'Bertram girls' when they were all young, to be able to tone down Miss Bertram's pride in her present position every now and then by judicious and patronising mention of the Eldons. Mrs. Granville has more than once goaded Miss Bertram into a state that would have made her verbally dangerous, had not the 'social bonds which bind us from the living truth' restrained her. There have been moments when Mrs. Granville's well-modulated laments over the manner in which

“ matters seem to grow worse and worse with the poor Eldons ” have robbed Miss Bertram of much of that serenely selfish satisfaction with a world which has dealt so kindly with herself, and which is her normal condition. “ People ought to know better than to make poverty-stricken marriages ; they make them for the gratification of their own idle fancies, and then punish people who have been more provident by either perpetually asking for assistance, or by living in such a beggarly way that one blushes to own them.” This Miss Bertram has said to herself over and over again when smarting under the Granville lash. But this year she has found that there is balm in Gilead after all. Mrs. Granville sits in the seat of the scornful, as of old, about the Eldons. But Mr. Granville tells Miss Bertram with yearning hearty gladness and satisfaction that her

“niece Daisy is the loveliest girl in the county.”

“She’s a girl the sight of whom makes an old man young again,” he tells Daisy’s aunt; “a sweet young creature, the sunshine of the parish!”

“When I saw her some years ago she was rather a pretty little child; still I’m surprised at your account of her, quite surprised!”

Miss Bertram says this guardedly and rather coldly, for she is conscious that Mrs. Granville is closely observant of her manner of hearing tidings of “the poor Eldons.”

“She really is a nice-looking girl; at least if you like that yellow hair, you would call her nice-looking,” Mrs. Granville says; “but she has not been well brought up—left to run wild; quite like a village lassie, you know. I assure you I was quite

shocked last week, when I had occasion to cross some fields on my way home from my poor, to see Miss Eldon sitting on a gatepost, wasting her time with a lot of trumpery wild flowers. It was not the thing at all for a girl in her position to be doing at that hour in the morning. And she had a great wild beast of a dog with her, that I really wonder at her father permitting her to keep, considering the extremely unpleasant state of his circumstances."

Miss Bertram blushes angrily as she listens. The sword enters into her spirit as Mrs. Granville thus triumphantly dares to pity, condemn, and depreciate the Eldon family. But a timely recollection of the undeniable ugliness of Mrs. Granville's own daughters, and of what has just been said relative to Daisy's loveliness, revives the fainting spirit of Daisy's aunt. She has been struck by



Mrs. Granville, and she will not hesitate now to give a counter-thrust. Accordingly she unsheathes her weapon and says suavely,

“I have been almost forgetting that Daisy is a grown-up young lady now. I must have her up with me for a few weeks, and give her the chance that her beauty deserves. There is a great deal of pleasure in taking a lovely girl into society, especially when she belongs to one.”

Mrs. Granville feels the stab, but she will not suffer herself to wince.

“It’s very kind and generous of you to think of giving this treat to your niece, my dear Miss Bertram; but *do* you think that it’s quite wise? Life, as they live it at Burnsleigh, will seem a very unendurable thing to Daisy Eldon after an experience, however brief, of your clique. I have often

refrained from asking her to my house for fear of unfitting her for her own home."

"I have no doubt but that you have been all that is thoughtful and considerate in the way of keeping Daisy back," Miss Bertram says bitterly ; "but if she's all your husband says she is, and she *pleases me*, there shall be no more painful contrasts in her life."

## CHAPTER II.

JUST about the time that Daisy's prospects are under discussion between her almost unknown aunt and Mrs. Granville, Daisy hears tidings that seem very good and joyful to her. They are brought home by her father, who has gathered them from the best authority this morning.

"Lincoln tells me that Harry Poynter is coming home very soon, and he has had orders to see about doing the old place up at once," Mr. Eldon tells them.

Now Lincoln is the steward of the Glenholme property, and the Glenholme property

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belongs to Harry Poynter, who has been abroad for many years, and who has only recently attained his majority. Some six years ago he visited Burnsleigh, but Glenholme was let to strangers then, and Harry had made his head-quarters at the rectory. He had come accompanied by a big mastiff puppy, and when he left them again the puppy Tartar remained behind with Daisy. This episode has been the sole bit of romance in Daisy's life. What wonder that she recalls it vividly and tenderly now when she hears that the young heir of Glenholme is coming back to his own again?

"Harry was a dear boy when he was here last, that time when he gave me Tartar," she remarks meditatively, when her father has brought his communication respecting Mr. Poynter to a close. "I wonder if he will have grown too big a man for us now."

"He'll have grown too big a man to swing with you in the garden or roast chestnuts with you in the harness-room; and as we have no other form of entertainment to offer him, we need not trouble our heads about him, I think, Daisy," Mrs. Eldon says, in a tone that is indicative of a desire to crush out the dawning interest in the "coming man" from her daughter's heart.

"Now, mamma, it's not like you to be ungracious to big men, any more than to little boys," Daisy says coaxingly. "We gave Harry a greeting when he was a hobbledehoy, and we wanted no return for it. We'll give him a greeting again now that he has grown out of his hobbledehoyhood, and there let it end—we shall want no return for that either."

"Why, Daisy, how seriously you speak?" Daisy's next sister, Ethel, says enquiringly.



“Not seriously—savagely, I’m afraid!” Daisy cries, rousing herself from her unwontedly serious mood. “For a minute I felt all awry with everything. Mamma dear, you are right: a young man about whose coming home a fuss is made, and paid for, is too big a man for us.”

“That’s just one of the nonsensical notions you girls take up,” Daisy’s elder brother remarks, lounging into the room with the air of one who is quite competent to put them all in the straight path that shall surely lead them to a right judgment. He is a year or two older than Daisy, and he too, like his old friend Henry Poynter, Esq., of Glenholme, has just attained his majority. But his majority has not brought him anything particularly good, saving the knowledge that he has to look out for himself in the future, and that if he wants bread-and-butter he must

work for it. Willie is a clever, sweet-natured, true-hearted young fellow, full of a queer mixture of a village simplicity and university audacity ; for Mr. Eldon has made a mighty effort, crippling himself and the others horribly to do it. He has sent Willie to Oxford ; and the boy has done well there, both as regards work and the making of friends. It is settled that in the course of a week or two he shall take his place as tutor to Lord Gerald Deane, the second son of the Marquis of Beauton, whose eldest son, Lord St. Briac, has been a college-friend of Willie's. Altogether it is gossipped in the village that the fortunes of the Eldon family are looking up a little just at this juncture ; for almost simultaneously with the report of Willie's having obtained this tutorship, another rumour arises to the effect that

“Miss Daisy’s rich aunt has asked her on a visit to London.”

That this is true soon becomes an ascertained fact. Daisy’s departure causes more commotion in Burnsleigh than the coming home of the young owner of Glenholme. Everybody knows the girl with the big blue, black-lashed eyes, and everybody likes her well. They have seen her grow up in their midst; this one has given her a ride on his horse; that one has given her the great delight of feeding his poultry and chasing his pigs. The farmers one and all pay their tithes more willingly to Mr. Eldon than they would to any other man, simply because he is “Miss Daisy’s father;” and as for the poor people (to whom she has but little to give, poor child, but a few stray pence at times, and an unceasingly kind interest), they would sacrifice Mrs. Granville and her ill-



favoured daughters at any given moment in cold blood for the sake of Daisy Eldon.

Miss Bertram's invitation to her niece is couched in the kindest terms; and late as her recognition of them is, they regard her tardiness with leniency on account of the consideration she shows for them.

"I want Daisy to stay with me until I leave town in August," she writes; "and perhaps by that time my niece and I will have become so well used to each other that we may both find it pleasant for her to accompany me to the seaside." Then Miss Bertram goes on to say that though it will be better that Daisy should defer getting a regular outfit until she, Miss Bertram, can superintend the transaction herself, still a little ready money may be desirable on the occasion, and she therefore begs to enclose her sister a fifty-pound note, to be used for Daisy's benefit.



Naturally the girl is enchanted at the prospect of the change of scene and society which has thus suddenly and unexpectedly opened out before her. She has borne her portion, and more than her portion of the burden of the weary, straightened, dull home-life brightly and uncomplainingly. But she is young, and full of that rare capacity for pleasure and excitement which only belongs to heart-free healthy youth. The thought that almost immediately she is to be given the freedom of the fashionable London life of which she has read, and faint rumours of which have reached her in the course of various stilted conversations she has held with the Miss Granvilles, delights, dazzles, almost intoxicates her. She has, like every other girl, dreamt of ballroom scenes of gaiety and splendour; she has longed to hear



operas and see plays and drive in the Park and ride a gallant steed in Rotten Row ; and now, by the grace of aunt Bertram, she will be enabled to realise her dreams. Like every other properly constituted girl, too, she rejoices in the thought of the pretty dresses and dainty boots and gloves, and the fairy-like structures of lace and flowers yecept bonnets, which will shortly adorn her supple slender figure and golden-crowned little head. But still, through the midst of all these pleasurable anticipations, there runs a vein of faint regret for all that she is leaving. She is the light of the house, the needle of the family, her mother's counsellor in all the never-ending, constantly-recurring household complications, her father's confidante in his numerous times of tribulation. Tartar, too, is a serious drawback to her tasting unalloyed felicity



in the idea of leaving home. The dear old dog is full of excellent feelings and good intentions; but she knows that he will not transfer his allegiance from herself to any member of her family, and that he will get into Bohemian habits of prowling about the village and picking up trifles in the way of rashly exposed beefsteaks and shoulders of mutton, in exchange for which no coin of the realm will be given.

“And if you’re chained up your sweet temper will be spoilt, my dog,” she observes to him, when she is telling him of the flight she is about to take. “O Tartar, what an auntly deed it would be on Miss Bertram’s part to include you in the invitation!”

She is sitting in the same reprehensible position—namely, on the gate-post at the top of the hill-pasture—with the same reprehensible companion lying at her feet,



as on the occasion of our first seeing her. She has been in the habit of sitting here during many hours of all the summer days of her life. She has come here to blow the cobwebs away many a time, when family distress, which she has been powerless either to relieve or assuage, has driven her out to the open for a taste of the sweetness and light which cannot exist in a home in which poverty reigns. She has come here in hours of happy idleness, when there has been no claim upon her industrious hands or her clear little brain in the home department; come here with some beloved book, in the perusal of which she has lost all memory of the harrowing influence of the home-life of incessant contrivance and non-achievement. But she has never come here before with such an undefinable



mixture of sadness and gladness in her heart as is therein this day.

There is a good deal of pathos in the majority of partings. Quite as much—and to the full quite as true—pathos in the tearing oneself away from the places as from the people who have endeared the places to us. The fact that

“No more by thee  
My steps shall be  
For ever and for ever”

is not a lamentable thing very often when the bare fact of leaving the brook is isolated. But it is impossible to consider the “bare fact” alone. A thousand associations—some tender, some true, some lacking the genuine ring of the metal, some sad, but all touching—well up as the hour of parting approaches. And the scenes that have many a time been pronounced un-

interesting, and the life that has often been avowed to be flat, tame, and unprofitable, are regretted keenly, chiefly because they are to be left.

There is a good deal of this phase of feeling in Daisy's mood this warm sweet day in June, as she sits here looking down over the waving pastures and across the leafy woods, and sees the smoke curling up from many a chimney in the village, on whose hearth she will be missed. Then her eyes roam away to the other side of the valley, and rest upon the picturesque many-gabled Glenholme; and she remembers that its owner will be home next week, and that she is going away for a visit of many months to-morrow.

"He'll think that I have forgotten him altogether when he finds that I have gone away just as he comes back, and that I've

even left the dog he gave me behind me. Tartar, if you could only speak, old dog, you could tell him a few truths, couldn't you? But, perhaps, he may not care to hear them now that he's coming back to take what Mr. Lincoln calls "his proper place in the county."

Somehow or other this reflection has such an effect on the young lady, before whom such a golden vista is stretching, that she takes her way home through the village dejectedly for the first time in her life. And her friends then regard her, in consequence of this unwonted aspect, more complacently than ever; for they think that it "shows such nice feeling on Daisy's part not to be elated at the prospect of leaving them."

Her new trunks are neatly packed this night with good stores of the choicest



wearing-apparel that the adjacent country town, and the unceasing efforts of two dressmakers and milliners, have been able to achieve in the time; and Daisy stands ready dressed in the hall, saying the last good-bye, waiting for the wagonette from the Burnsleigh Arms to come to convey her to the railway-station seven miles off. There are a good many tears shed at the parting. Poor Mrs. Eldon looks forward with a sinking heart to the weary weeks which must elapse before she has any more efficient aid in her herculean task of trying to keep things in order than may be given her by Ethel. That Ethel is as great a darling in her way as Daisy, no one can deny; but she is a perfect mistress of the art of creating confusion and disorder. But even through the tears which blind the mother's eyes the mother perceives proudly



that this eldest child of hers is as fair a flower as can ever have blossomed, no matter under what conditions of luxury, care, culture, and refinement.

“Daisy will stand comparison with any of the wealthy aristocrats whom my sister worships,” she says to her husband. And though he tries to be partly amused at, and partly contemptuous of, the maternal vanity, he shares his wife’s pride in the glory of Daisy’s beauty to its fullest extent.

In truth, though in days to come the choicest triumphs of the respective arts of Mesdames Elise and Louise may adorn Daisy’s person, she will never look lovelier than she does this morning in her plain blue-cambrie dress and white hat with the one blue feather. The soft cerulean tint harmonises with the clear transparent skin



and with the bright golden hair marvelously well.

"Bless you, my own!" her mother whispers when the moment for the final farewell comes. "I feel as if you would never be quite one of us again."

"And I feel a conviction that I shall come back and live and die in Burnsleigh, mamma," the girl says, feigning a cheerfulness she does not feel. Then for a minute or two she becomes a mere shuttlecock in the midst of those affectionate battledoors, her brothers and sisters; and presently, after hugging Tartar, Daisy is gone.

It is six o'clock in the evening when she reaches the terminus where her aunt's carriage and her aunt's maid await her. The maid has come on the mission with the very faintest interest in her heart concerning the object of it. In Miss

Beatram's country-bred niece she has anticipated finding a *gauche*, ill-dressed young woman without "any style," whom she determines to "put in her proper place" at once, in order that no opposition influence to her own may be obtained over Miss Bertram. But when this perfectly self-possessed, beautiful, and well-dressed young lady looks at her quietly, and directs her to "see to my luggage," Wharton, Miss Bertram's "own maid" renounces all her preconceived putting-down intentions hurriedly, and finds herself obeying the intruder instead of dictating to her.

Nevertheless, when they get into the carriage and roll away towards Wimpole-street, the "pampered menial" makes one attempt at getting the whip-hand of the "poor relation." If Daisy can only be made to feel her own insignificance at



starting sufficiently for Wharton to venture to offer her advice, then will her mistress's niece be an innocuous element in the house, Wharton feels tolerably well convinced. Acting on this conviction, she says,

“What a nice thing for you, miss, to be sure, to have such a treat as this!”

Daisy levels her long sweet blue eyes at the speaker, and fixes the latter well with them before she replies.

“I don't understand you; you must tell me what you mean.”

Wharton fidgets under the gaze; for all their sweetness, the blue eyes can look stern enough when occasion requires.

“I mean that it must be such a grand change for you, miss, to come up to a lady like your aunt, who lives in such style as will surprise you. I know what it is for young ladies to come away from their



quiet country homes, where they never see no life nor nothing. They feel quite lost very often."

"I dont think you need trouble yourself about my feeling that; thank you," Daisy puts in quietly.

But Wharton feels that she must accomplish her noble aim now or never, and so goes on eagerly,

"So any little advice I can give you about what you had better get and what will please your aunt, I'm sure I shall be most happy to offer. Miss Bertram, like all the great ladies, has her moods, and I understand them, and can often give you a hint. You see, I've been used to great ladies and their ways all my life."

"And I have not," Daisy says coolly. "I will tell my aunt what you say; and if she wishes me to put myself under the



tuition of her maid, I shall know what to do."

"No offence was meant, miss," the woman says confusedly; for she feels that she has been worsted by the young lady, and imperilled her own position with the young lady's aunt.

### CHAPTER III.

DAISY has been just a month in London. She has been presented, and danced at Marlborough House; she has heard Patti and Nicolini in half a dozen operas; she has been to all the best theatres; watched the polo lists at Hurlingham, and incited the champions on either side to doughty deeds for the sake of her approving smiles. She has been the belle of a dozen ball-rooms, the secret of success at many of those usually dreary things, "afternoons at home," which her aunt will persist in



frequenting; and altogether has approved herself the best investment Miss Bertram could possibly have made from a society point of view.

Daisy has, in fact, brought an enormous amount of grist to that mill of fashion, in which Miss Bertram is so gratified at being ground. The girl, with her fresh, vigorous, happy youth and beauty, has taught the selfish wealthy old maid some useful lessons. With her whole heart, and with all the intensity of her vigorous young body and mind, Daisy can enjoy—and does enjoy—the enjoyable. With equal wholeheartedness and intensity she spurns the most glorious and enjoyable ends, if the means by which she can attain them are not without flaw or blemish.

She has not been admirably well paraded on the boards of that great theatre, the



world of fashion, for nothing, her aunt feels proudly, when Sir Bolingbroke Bray begins to haunt her path, and intrigue for invitations to houses at which he knows the Daisy will appear. But the Daisy is woefully blind to her own interests, it seems to Miss Bertram, as she remarks that Daisy's smiling flexible lips rarely open when Sir Bolingbroke is her partner, and that if her eyes light on him by any chance there comes a look of sorrowful scorn into their depths, that is very detrimental to her chances of becoming Lady Bray. "Daisy's a darling," her aunt thinks, in common with every one else; "but baronets of ancient lineage and large rent-roll do not grow on every bush." Moreover, the young man is handsome, and quite clever enough for every-day life. What can be blinding Daisy's vision that she does not

see the advantages of such a match? Perhaps it may be that Daisy is in no haste to be "woo'd and married and a'," by reason of some vague unfounded hope she may have of inheriting her aunt's property. Miss Bertram determines to rid her niece of the burden this error will be to her without delay, and to tackle the subject with spirit and determination, one morning while Daisy is waiting for the horses to come round for her to go into the Row.

The girl, who is very pretty in any and every kind of garment that the ingenuity of garment-makers can devise, looks supremely well in her habit. For erectness, for ease, for having that air of being at home in her saddle without which the most daring and skilful of riders look out of place on horseback, Daisy challenges competition.

with the most famous horsewomen of the day. She takes her fast-trotting little bay horse, the Knave of Hearts, through the throng at a pace which excites its admiration, and in a way that does not excite its awe. It is the sight of her on horseback which has brought Sir Bolingbroke Bray to the conclusion that happiness and he will be strangers, unless he throws the handkerchief to her, and she picks it up with proper humility and flattering eagerness.

"You like this riding, and the round altogether, don't you, my dear?" her aunt begins.

"Like it! I love it!" the girl replies. "You have given me so much happiness, aunt Bertram! For this one month's joy that I've had, I can never be sufficiently grateful to you, even if I spend all the rest

of my life in thanking you for this bit of gold that you've let into it."

Miss Bertram is almost moved from her disillusionary purpose by the ungrudging way in which Daisy pours forth her gratitude. However, the old lady nerves herself to the task by a timely remembrance of Sir Bolingbroke, the young baronet who has been touted for assiduously by the most long-sighted mammas during the whole of this and last season. The consideration that Daisy may do what is wise and well in the way of smiling upon his suit, if she imagines that unless she does so her only alternative will be to retire into the beautiful but monotonous shades of Burnsleigh, checks Miss Bertram in the good resolve to be generous which she has almost made. Accordingly she steels her sympathetic heart, and says,

"I'm glad that your visit to me has been such a pleasant one, my dear Daisy; but I can't help feeling that there has been more amiability than discretion in my conduct towards you. I have given you a taste for a manner of life that is, of course, quite dissimilar to the one you will have to lead at Burnsleigh when you go home again. Look out there at the little Knave of Hearts; see how his skin gleams in the sun. Poor child! How you will feel parting with that horse!"

"Yes, I shall feel it terribly," Daisy admits, with a short sigh; "but anyway, aunt Bertram, I have had the pleasure of which no one can rob me, of having ridden him, and of having seen that he is more admired than any horse in the Row."

It occurs to Daisy, as she says this, that if her aunt's sorrow at the separation which

is to ensue between horse and rider is very sincere, the way may easily be paved by Miss Bertram's gold for the Knave of Hearts taking up his residence permanently in Burnsleigh.

"He is not more admired than his rider is, I hear on all sides," Miss Bertram says, as archly as she can bring herself to speak in her anxiety. "Sir Bolingbroke was saying only yesterday—"

"Something not worth hearing, I'm sure, as he said it. Now, aunt, I'm off."

She holds her winsome face up to her aunt to be kissed, as she speaks, and the old lady takes it tenderly between her two withered ring-weighted hands, and says,

"My dear, I wish you would think it worth while to listen to something he has to say to you. Think, Daisy: he can give his wife all, and far more than, I have been

able to give you of pleasure and luxury. You would like to have your own carriages, your own opera-box, your own place in society, as one of its brightest ornaments ; and you would like to be in a position to help those at home, wouldn't you, Daisy ? Think of what you can do for your poor broken-down father and your worried worn-out mother. Think of the aid you might be to your brothers and sisters if you will only be wise. Wouldn't you like to have all the luxuries and the power of doing good that I've named ? ”

“ Very much indeed.”

“ Then you will be wise ? ”

“ I hope so, aunt Bertram. As you say, mamma is a worried and worn-out woman ; more shame to those who might have saved her from being either ! But she has always had the strength to teach her children to

try to do what is right ; and if we attend to our mother's teaching, and try to do what is right, we shall surely do what is wise."

"Then you will listen when Sir Bolingbroke speaks to you, as I know he is dying to speak, Daisy?"

"Yes, I will."

"My darling sensible child ! You shall have the most perfect *trousseau* of the year ! You *will* listen ! My dearest hopes are realised !"

Miss Bertram caresses her niece more affectionately than she has ever caressed anything, save her white Persian cat, in her life before, for she sees in that niece the future Lady Bray. Her niece responds to these caresses by saying,

"I will listen to Sir Bolingbroke when he offers me the carriages and horses and

jewels and opera-box you speak of. And when he has finished, I will ask him where the woman to whom they belong of right is. Aunt Bertram, do you think I am deaf? Don't you think I have heard the story of his heartless neglect of the poor girl he married—neglect and unkindness which drove her so far wrong that he was able to divorce her? Before Sir Bolingbroke persuades me to be his wife he must drug my memories, and undo the teaching of my mother's example!" And with these words on her lips, and righteous wrath against Sir Bolingbroke and all who would advocate his cause with her in her heart, Daisy Eldon goes away for her customary morning's ride.

It will be hard to renounce it all, the young blonde beauty feels, as she turns in at the Apsley House Gate, followed by her



model groom, and lets the Knave of Hearts go off at that striding trot of his, which easily covers eighteen miles within the hour. The Row is very full this morning, and a hundred hats are raised to Daisy as she winds her way skilfully through the crowd of riders on her way down. Dozens of other acquaintances, both masculine and feminine, are leaning against the railings and sitting upon the chairs. These bide their time patiently for a word or a bow or a nod from the young beauty, who is also reputed to be the rich Miss Bertram's heiress. Pleasure is expressed in the faces of all she knows at the sight of her, for Daisy has achieved the rare distinction of being liked by women as much as she is admired by men. She has never damaged a rival's cause by damning her with faint praise. She has never vaunted herself in

any way, either by word or deed or look. She has never, in short, boasted or triumphed about herself to the depreciation of any other girl; and so she is liked and imitated and courted by all the female portion of her aunt's coterie, who are wise enough in their generation to perceive that her chances are better than their own, in spite of her having made such a late appearance on the boards of society.

She is a very fair specimen of a well-bred young Englishwoman, as, having "taken it out of him" in a sharp trot down to the Kensington Gardens rails, Daisy turns, and, holding her handsome little horse in to a walk, rides slowly along. There is no "doubt" about Miss Eldon, even in this place, where discernment is so sorely taxed. There is not a superfluous button, not an unnecessary bit of braid about her navy-

blue habit ; and round the brim of her hat there is not a superfluous half-inch of tulle. You remark immediately that she does not ride to her audience, and that both horse and rider are perfect types of their respective kinds. But if you do not know her you remark nothing further.

Truth to tell, she is riding the Knave of Hearts with most reprehensible carelessness this morning ; for her mind is very much given to the consideration of that question concerning Sir Bolingbroke which her aunt has raised with auntly zeal and indiscretion. Miss Bertram's words have not borne all the fruit she intended them to bear ; still they have had some weight with the girl, who has up to this morning enjoyed all that is enjoyable without troubling very much as to what is to follow. But now, as Daisy rides slowly along she falls to thinking of

what the home-life down at Burnsleigh is ; and when she has thoroughly resuscitated the memories of it, she has it borne in upon her vividly that she will have to go back to that life, and resume it, just as though this brilliant episode had never come within her experience. The sweet blue eyes are gazing apparently at the living panorama before her. In reality they are looking into the future, and seeing all the gloom of it.

She is startled abruptly from her day-dream by the Knave of Hearts suddenly swerving to the near side, and then returning to the path of duty by a series of plunges. Well-bred horse as he is, he cannot always control an emotion of surprise, and he has experienced a profound one in seeing a young man who is leaning on the railings sweep off his hat in salute to Miss Eldon. He is an English horse, and



utterly unaccustomed to the society of men who signalise the fact of their existence before the lady has nodded an acknowledgment of it.

Of course Daisy sits the shy. If I ever venture to unseat a heroine, it shall be in a little country lane, where no one can see her. For though such accidents do happen in public places in real life, it is not advisable that they should ever befall a heroine of romance. The majority prefer that she should be a sort of female Admirable Crichton, and it is well to respect the prejudices of the majority.

But though Daisy remains in the saddle, the shy arouses her suddenly from her day-dream, and looking with understanding for the cause of the emotion of the Knave of Hearts, she finds it in a young, tall, lissom-figured man, whose swathy face is glowing



with satisfaction at the sight of her, and whose tawny eyes are riveted upon hers with a tender earnestness that brings vividly before her a half-forgotten scene, in which a handsome boy transferred a well-loved mastiff puppy to the care and ownership of a golden-haired slip of a girl.

The Knave is almost brought upon his haunches by a dexterous turn of her wrist, and in a moment she is leaning forward holding her hand out with hearty gladness.

"Harry Poynter! How did you know me?"

"By your eyes and hair, Daisy," the young fellow replies; "they're not changed, though you are. But I ask the same question: how did you know me?"

"I knew—" she begins, then she hesitates. It is difficult to say how she recognised him.

In the old days he had been the pleasantest object on which her vision ever lighted, and now, though he is utterly different from the boy whom she remembers, there is no one who may with him compare. "You're very different from what you were when you gave me Tartar; but still somehow you're like your old self," she says at last; and as she says it she sees Sir Bolingbroke Bray approaching her.

"So you remember Tartar, too," Mr. Poynter says delightedly; and her attention being caught by Sir Bolingbroke at this juncture, it is some few moments before she can reply.

"Remember Tartar! Does one forget one's dearest friend after being separated from him for a month?"

"Who's the happy man who occupies that proud position, Miss Eldon?" Sir



Bolingbroke says lightly, laughing. He quite means to have Daisy for his wife ; but it does not stir the faintest jealousy within him to hear her speak of some one unknown as her dearest friend. If she will only become Lady Bray he is quite prepared to bear the burden of her forming a dozen " dearest friendships," if she feels so inclined.

" He's only a dog," Daisy says ; and then she turns a little in her saddle, and inclines her head slightly to Sir Bolingbroke, in a way that ought to show him that she considers their interview at an end—that he is free to, and she ready and willing that he should, ride on—and that she desires to resume uninterrupted intercourse with the handsome, debonair-looking young fellow who is leaning over the rails.

But this is not at all within the limits of



Sir Bolingbroke's intentions. A rival in the abstract, or even a defined rival if he only be absent, is endurable enough to the young baronet. But a rival well defined and present, who engrosses Daisy's attention away from Sir Bolingbroke Bray, is quite a different thing.

"I shall have the honour—your aunt has accorded me her permission—of being your escort this morning, Miss Eldon," he says, sitting at ease coolly, and regarding Mr. Poynter with the same lazy expression of interest which he might exert himself to evince at sight of an Indian brave or a fine specimen of a wild red-deer. There is about Harry Poynter such vitality, such young, healthy, happy vigour and freshness, that he is a marked object here in the ranks of languid, bored, fashionable-looking men. It is not that the recently returned squire



of Glenholme is rough, unpolished, ill-dressed, or "bad form" in any way; it is simply his looking thoroughly "alive" which distinguishes him from the majority of the men who are inertly reclining in divers attitudes that are expressive of utter weariness on the railings under the blazing July sun. Daisy, who is replete with the same physical force herself, perceives and appreciates it quickly in another, especially when it is presented in so fair a guise as in the person of her old friend Harry Poynter.

Tartar is a very thawing topic. They discuss him as he was in the days of his infantile grace and innocence, and Daisy describes the dog into which he has developed. She winds up her essay on Tartar by saying,

"But how is it that you've been so long in England without seeing him?"

“Because,” he says, “I denied myself that bliss in order to watch for the opportunity, which has come at last, of seeing you.

Daisy’s pearly face grows pink as she hears him, and her eyes gleam like stars with the sweet pleasure she feels in her old friend’s remembrance of her. Of what avail is it to Sir Bolingbroke now that he has the place at her off-side for the remainder of this morning’s ride? Harry Poynter has the nearer place in her interest; and *that* once fairly awakened, the end is not so very unforeseen.

“It has been the one drawback to my otherwise perfect felicity up here, that I wasn’t down at Burnsleigh when they welcomed you to your ‘own again,’” she says to young Poynter, disregarding grandly the symptoms Sir Bolingbroke is lazily develop-

ing of its being his opinion that it would be well for them to move on.

"I had stayed away from 'my own' for a good many years for other people's pleasure; it occurred to me that it wouldn't hurt other people very much if I stayed away a little longer for my own," he answers, sparkling up with a sense of the entire appreciation she will have for all that is meant or may be meant by his speech. "I didn't feel inclined to hie me home the instant I was free to do so; the place and I know so little of each other that I shall see very little of it, if itself is the only attraction it offers me."

"You shall not be an absentee," she cries out. "I mean—I beg your pardon, Mr. Poynter, but I live in the place, you know, and understand all about the advantages and disadvantages of your absence or presence."

The people you let it to were rich and good enough in their way ; but they thought more about the London shop by which they make their money—very naturally—than they did about ameliorating the condition of the poor or oiling the social hinges of the neighbourhood. And papa was a sort of target between those new people and the Granvilles and others of the Granville ilk, and papa suffered. Don't you understand now why I wish you to go home and to stay at home—as you will, Harry ?”

She bends forward again to offer him her hand in farewell as she says this, and a smile like a sunburst gleams forth from her glorious eyes and breaks the lines that have been sombre about her flexible lips.

“ O Daisy, Daisy, if you look like that I'll go to Glenholme or to anywhere else for your sake,” he mutters ; and then he adds

aloud, "May I have your address? I hear you are staying with your aunt, Miss Bertram."

She gives him her card at once gladly, and now Sir Bolingbroke feels that the time has come for him to assert himself.

"In the interests of the Knave I must beg you to come on, Miss Eldon; he has chafed against your unconsciously tightened hand till his mouth is bleeding."

She slackens her rein at once, and the clever little horse steps out in his matchless style without another suggestion being made to him. "Come and call on us to-morrow," the girl lilts out to Harry Poynter, turning her bright face towards him encouragingly; and as he shouts back his promise to do so, he resolves that he will call and call again till he wins the right to call this darling Daisy his own.



Sir Bolingbroke is very sensible. He sees that Daisy is in a rarefied atmosphere, the chief elements of which are recollection and possibility, admiration for a new type, sympathy with a good-looking adventurer upon an untried career, and girlish glee in the part she is playing of wielder of strong men's wills.

"Let her nourish her fancies," Sir Bolingbroke thinks as he trots along by the Knave's side, discoursing of the wind and the sun, the weather and the forthcoming banquet at Orleans House, the impossibility of existing in London an hour after "one feels that the time to go has come," and the miserable nothingness of a life that has to be lived away from London altogether. "Let her nourish her fancies; they are intangibilities that will never interfere with my comfort; and the efforts she makes at nursing them



throws an enormous amount of expression into those seas of love and phantasy—her eyes.”

Accordingly, in fulfilment of his view of the case, Sir Bolingbroke sends sentiment to the right-about altogether this morning, and talks nothing but society to her.

“You’ll be at Lady Beauton’s to-morrow of course?” he half questions. “St. Briac is to conquer the heiress of the year, Miss Millard, on his own ground—it’s an understood thing: she goes for the title and his good looks, and he goes for all that ‘cotton’ can procure him.”

“How very funny, and how very sad!” Daisy says sagely. “You speak just as if Miss Millard were a bale of goods, and as if Lord St. Briac wouldn’t have to live with her so long as they both do live, if they marry.”

"That doesn't always follow, Miss Eldon," Sir Bolingbroke answers with (to his credit, be it said) a heightened colour.

"What doesn't always follow?" the Daisy asks, in innocent forgetfulness of the "story" of Sir Bolingbroke and Lady Bray.

"Well, it doesn't always happen that people live together, 'so long as they both do live,' because they marry unadvisedly. Let me tell you—"

"No; tell me nothing," Daisy interrupts. "People shouldn't marry unadvisedly. We can all stay as we are if we can't marry the one we love; and if we marry the one we love, then it must be all right."

"That's your theory," he lisps laughingly.

"That's what I believe, Sir Bolingbroke."

"Well, my practice has been somewhat

different ; but I won't defile your ears by giving you a recital of the last Lady Bray's works. I have been a very badly-treated man, and I thought myself a blighted man, Miss Eldon, until I saw you ; now I feel that I still have a motive in life, and that motive is to win you for my wife."

He is a graceful, lissom, well-favoured young fellow, and he has a baronetcy and twenty thousand a year. Daisy remembers that he is, and that he has all these advantages, as she listens to him. Across her mind, too, as she listens, there flashes a vision of what Burnsleigh life is and will be. But closely following on that vision there comes one of a gallant-looking, dark-eyed, sanguine-complexioned man, who has looked at her this day with a look to which her heart has beaten responsively, in a way that it has never beaten to the look of another



man. And side by side with this remembrance there rises another—that of Sir Bolingbroke's sorely tried, sadly fallen, lost, unmentioned, and unmentionable wife.

Daisy is not a woman of the world yet. She does not understand that "these things are," but are not to be mentioned. So she comes out with rather a hard rejoinder to his request.

"What an unworthy motive, Sir Bolingbroke! For your real wife is still alive, isn't she?"

"She is not my wife. Don't you understand that I have divorced her?"

"I don't understand anything of the sort; I only understand what God has joined together man cannot put asunder. I am sorry for you, for I think you ought to live the rest of your life alone, and that thought is a sad one. Now, shall we go home?"

"I am to consider your answer a final one?"

"Yes, please," she says simply; and then, as they come to the end of the Row, she puts her hand out to wish him good-bye, and says,

"No one will know of this from me, Sir Bolingbroke."

"I don't care who knows that I have 'loved the highest,' though it's been my ill-fortune to have loved in vain," he says, in a tone of such brave sincerity that Daisy's heart melts towards him, and her eyes beam such admiration for the manly candour with which he speaks of his disappointment, that he takes heart of grace, and determines to "try her again" at some future day. "Her head is a trifle turned by the success she has had," he tells himself. "When the season is over, and she has to face the par-

sonage and the poverty again, she'll take a more lenient view of my position."

Meanwhile Daisy rides home with her head and heart in a whirl of delight at the unexpected *rencontre* she has had with her old friend Harry Poynter. By the time she gets into her aunt's presence she has forgotten all about Sir Bolingbroke Bray, and so she replies to Miss Bertram's anxious inquiry, "Well have you seen him?" with the words,

"Yes, aunt, and it has made me so happy; he's coming here to call to-morrow."

"It's rather strange that he does not come to-day, I think," Miss Bertram cries, embracing Daisy rapturously; "my darling child, I am so pleased! The best match of the season! Twenty thousand a year and a title! They will admit down at Burnsleigh that I have done well for my niece."

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"Are you thinking of Sir Bolingbroke?" Daisy stammers.

"Of course I am; of whom else can I—of you—be thinking?" Miss Bertram almost screams.

"I was thinking of my old friend Harry Poynter," Daisy says, blushing and laughing. "I told you when I came up first, if you remember, that the young Squire of Glenholme was coming back to live. O, didn't I mention it? I'm surprised at that, for I was thinking about him a great deal. He gave me Tartar. Well, this morning I saw him in the Row, and, O aunt Bertram, he has grown so handsome, and he looks so splendid and manly! He's coming to-morrow to call on you—"

"Have you seen Sir Bolingbroke?" Miss Bertram interrupted sternly.

"Yes."

Daisy feels that she is going to be sharply cross-examined, and nerves herself to the task of baffling her aunt's curiosity and keeping her promise of "not letting any one know" that she had rejected the baronet.

"You have seen him, and he has spoken to you? At least he went to the Row for that purpose this morning,"

"Yes, he spoke to me," Daisy says innocently.

"And what have you said to him?"

"O, a number of things! I was in such high spirits at having seen Harry that I talked more than usual, I think."

"Do leave Harry, as you call him (I detest such familiarity between young men and women as exists in the present day) out of the conversation, and tell me, without further frivolity, how you and Sir Bolingbroke stand with regard to each other."

"Very pleasantly, I believe," Daisy says quietly. "He told me about Lord St. Briac and Miss Millard: Lord St. Briac wants her money, Sir Bolingbroke says, and she wants the title. It's to be arranged to-morrow at Lady Beauton's dance. Are we going to it, aunt? Sir Bolingbroke asked me, and I couldn't tell him."

"We are," Miss Bertram says curtly. Then she sits in silence for a few minutes, feeling puzzled and disappointed. Sir Bolingbroke has evidently, she thinks, either failed to find an opportunity of wooing Daisy this morning, or failed to use it. No girl could resist avowing that she had received such a brilliant offer, if the offer had been made; at least ninety-nine girls out of a hundred could not refrain from uttering the vaunt. However, it is just possible, she feels, that Daisy may be the exceptional hundredth.

So she makes one more effort to discover exactly how things are.

“And that was all he said? You have nothing more to tell me?”

“Well, aunt, to tell the truth, I can’t remember all he said. He spoke about St. Briac and Miss Millard—that I’ve told you; and we talked of Tartar; and he said how splendidly the Knave trotted. And so he does, aunt Bertram; there isn’t another horse that comes near him as to pace or style of going.”

“Wasted his time talking about Tartar and the Knave, the great goose!” Miss Bertram thinks angrily, but she says aloud,

“Yes, Sir Bolingbroke is a good judge of horses, as he is of most things. The woman who is fortunate enough to win him will be the mistress of the best-appointed establishment in London;” and after saying this Miss Bertram does allow Sir Bolingbroke to drop out of the conversation.



#### CHAPTER IV.

THERE is a great deal of diplomatic talent displayed the next day both by Miss Bertram and her niece. The former has made up her mind that Daisy shall be out of the way when this very superfluous young squire of Glenholme calls. And Daisy has made up *her* mind that nothing short of physical force shall get her out of the house while there is a possibility of his coming to it. She takes her morning ride contentedly enough, for she knows that there is no chance of her missing him at that hour.

Indeed, she half hopes to find the stalwart young Apollo leaning over the rails again. She cannot help experiencing a pang of disappointment when, after riding up and down twice, she fails to find him among the crowd. "He ought to have taken it for granted that I should be here again to-day," she says poutingly to herself, and then she blushes a conscious burning blush as it flashes across her that, perhaps, he is not sufficiently interested in her to take the trouble to haunt any particular spot for the sake of seeing her. "I *am* a goose," Daisy says to herself: "because he seemed glad to see me yesterday, I fancied he might care to try and see me again this morning; when I ought to have known that he would have been just as glad to see papa, or Tartar, or any one from Burnsleigh." Then she resolves not to think a bit more about Harry

Poynter, and carries out her resolve by thinking of him vigorously for the remainder of her ride.

It is after luncheon that the aunt and niece develop their respective diplomatic powers. Miss Bertram, who, in the ordinary course of things, never thinks of driving out before four o'clock in July, announces to-day that she will go out at three, and that Daisy must accompany her, to choose some lace which she designs shall decorate Daisy on a very special occasion.

"Aunt Bertram, if we go at three we shall fall victims to *coup de soleil*, and I shall be unable to go to Lady Beauton's to-night," Daisy says speciously; and Miss Bertram's resolution begins to waver. Then she remembers that "this Mr. Poynter" is imminent, and says,

"My dear Daisy, the sun is no fiercer at

three than at four ; and there's no saying how soon this lace may be wanted. Did Sir Bolingbroke make a special point of your being at Lady Beauton's to-night ? ”

“ He seemed to wish me to be there,” Daisy says.

She feels slightly remorseful about the way in which she is using Sir Bolingbroke as an instrument to work out her design of staying in to see Harry Poynter. Still, remorseful as she feels, she uses him.

“ Then we will go,” Miss Bertram says decidedly ; “ but a little quiet drive won't hurt you. We'll settle about the lace, and go down to Covent Garden to order in any new plants we may see, and then we will go to the Park. I will let you off going to Mrs. Granville's “ afternoon,” and won't ask you to make a single call to-day if you're ready to go with me at three.”

“Aunt Bertram—” Daisy pauses for a moment or two. She is about to plead that she “must stay at home to write to mamma;” but the honesty of her nature prevents her making any more false excuses. “Aunt Bertram, I want to stay at home this afternoon to see Harry Poynter,” she says suddenly. “Don’t think me bold and forward, and everything of the kind, for saying so; but I feel that it would make me very unhappy to go out when I know that he is coming. We were boy and girl together, you know, and he gave me Tartar; and till you know Tartar you can’t understand what a strong claim the gift of the dog gives Harry on my gratitude; and we shall both of us be living down at Burnsleigh again, by and by; and *don’t* you see that it’s impossible that I should behave discourteously to him?”

Daisy sinks on a low stool by her aunt's side as she says this, and wheedles the old lady to the utmost of her wheedling power. But Miss Bertram remembers all that Daisy may lose through an inopportune display of interest in Mr. Poynter. She has found out from Mrs. Granville that the Glenholme property is only worth two thousand a year. Daisy must not be permitted to fling herself away on such a pittance, when Sir Bolingbroke's twenty thousand per annum may be at her disposal, if only she is wise. "I should not be doing my duty to her or to her family," Miss Bertram says to herself, "if I encouraged her in hankering after this young man; he will do for one of her less pretty sisters, but my girl must make the success of the season."

Fraught with this feeling she opens her affectionate battery upon her young charge.

"Mr. Poynter will hardly expect you to run to meet him in such an extremely marked manner, Daisy. He would probably feel nothing but surprise if he came here and found you had upset our daily routine for the sake of receiving him. My dear child, the thing can't be done; if he were your accepted lover even, I wouldn't permit you to renounce society for the sake of staying at home to sentimentalise like a village schoolgirl; and I have yet to learn that he stands on that footing with you."

Daisy crinkles, ceases from wheedling, and starts up in a moment.

"I have told you exactly what he is, and how I regard him. I wish you hadn't said that about his being my accepted lover, aunt Bertram. You've put a thought in my head that has never been there before about Harry Poynter, and it may make me awk-

ward when I meet him. "However, I'll do as you please now ; after what you have said, I'd rather not see him to-day."

The girl is hurt, unmistakably hurt ; and Miss Bertram feels a little sorry for the pain she has "unavoidably" inflicted. But she stands acquitted in her own mind of having employed any other than the most justifiable means to compass her praiseworthy end. She loves Daisy dearly : a little because Daisy is of her own flesh and blood ; a little because Daisy is so lovely that she has brought reflected lustre to Miss Bertram ; and a great deal because, by the grace of Sir Bolingbroke Bray, Daisy may be a leader of society next year. Still, loving Daisy dearly as she does, she does not repent having wounded the poor child, since the pain inflicted has caused Daisy to take the course her aunt deems desirable.



"It's just as well that girls should see their conduct with other people's eyes at times," she says suavely. "Of course I know that you would have had no ulterior object in staying at home to receive this young man; but he might have thought you had. Young men are so apt to be deluded by their vanity."

So Daisy lets herself be carried off to look at the pattern of a set of lace flounces which her aunt Bertram is well disposed to order for her; and Daisy is not in the mood to see the beauty of the most beautiful lace to-day.

"You had better save your money, aunt Bertram," she says, when she hears the price, which appears appalling to her. "What good will that lace be to me at Burnsleigh? I shall be afraid to wear it, because Mrs. Granville will turn and rend

me for presuming to possess anything so much better than she has herself."

"It's more than probable that if you ever wear it at Burnsleigh, you will be in such a position that Mrs. Granville will not care to cavil at anything you may please to wear," aunt Bertram replies, with an air of mysterious sagacity that is extremely annoying to Daisy, since the latter dare not openly demand the reason of it. "I musn't do anything to make aunt Bertram work back to the subject of Sir Bolingbroke," the girl thinks. "If I do, there's no knowing what she may not taunt me into doing or promising to do; she's quite capable of even saying that I have given my heart to Harry Poynter before he has asked me for it."

Somehow or other the thought of Harry Poynter carries her almost complacently through the weary work of shopping, which

her aunt insists upon her performing this afternoon. In all matters connected with the adornment and further gracing of her niece's most graceful person, Miss Bertram has been liberal, not to say lavish, all through Daisy's brief campaign. But this day she outdoes all her former efforts at munificence, and still Daisy fails to feel as grateful as she fancies she ought to feel. Instinctively she understands that her aunt is not giving her rich gifts because she loves her—and generosity towards the object is the natural outcome of love—but because there is a probability of her making a brilliant marriage, and occupying a prominent place in society. Moreover, all that Miss Bertram does for Daisy, and all that she gives to Daisy, is done and given in the overpowering and semi-patronising way in which rich people invariably bestow boons upon their poor re-

lations. The girl's heart and soul are in revolt when her aunt puts bracelets and necklets of gold and jewels of price about her. "If she would only give me the money, and let me send it to poor mamma," Daisy thinks, with tears in her eyes, "then I could say 'thank you' with my whole heart; but as it is I don't thank her a bit in reality; she only does it in the hope that it may redound to her own honour and glory."

The shopping is over at last; and as it is nearly five o'clock, and Daisy looks so pale and tired that Miss Bertram is alarmed for her appearance this night at the Marchioness of Beauton's, she consents to waive the drive in the Park for once. "That young man from the wilds will have been and gone before now," the aunt tells herself; and the niece simultaneously is thinking,

“Harry is sure to think that I’m so elated by this brief London experience of mine that my head is turned to the extent of making me forgetful of old friends. And if he thinks that, he will despise me, and never come near me again.”

This consideration takes the bloom off her cheeks, robs her eyes of their starry light, and depresses her so thoroughly altogether that it is a very pallid and sad-looking Daisy who looks up, when the carriage stops at her aunt’s door, to see Mr. Poynter standing on the doorstep.

In a moment all her views of life in general, and of her aunt’s conduct in particular, undergo a change. She forgives Miss Bertram the drive, Sir Bolingbroke, the jewelry and laces, the patronage, and all her other enormities. How can she feel other than forgiving and beneficent now that he is

here, showing his gladness and pleasure at the sight of her so openly and eagerly? Even Miss Bertram, disgusted as she is at having been outwitted by chance in this way, cannot make up her mind to do other than accord a civil welcome to the brilliant-looking, gracious-mannered young fellow. She even goes so far as to acknowledge in the recesses of her own heart that Harry Poynter would have her casting-vote, if there were not such a mighty disproportion between his income and Sir Bolingbroke's. As it is, "Daisy must not see any more of him after this," she determines; "no man I know can stand a chance while he is in the field."

Happily for the young pair they are unconscious of this determination on Miss Bertram's part, and so an hour slips away very pleasantly over afternoon tea in Miss

Bertram's drawing-room. The room is large and is one of those earthly paradises, a room full of nooks and corners. Miss Bertram is not very æsthetic in many of her tastes, but she is the possessor of a large collection of old china and *bric-à-brac*. Harry Poynter blesses the cups and saucers, the old Florentine brass-work and Venetian mirrors as they give him an excuse for loitering round the room, penetrating into the nooks and disappearing round the corners with Daisy while she describes the various *objets d'art* to him. Miss Bertram sits and seethes at the sight, but she is compelled to seethe silently. She cannot show such a want of confidence in her niece as to order her to sit down; and she cannot, as a civilised hostess, curb that young man's apparently irrepressible desire for instruction! Nor can she get up and follow them

about. "It must never happen again, it shall never happen again," she says, in nervous agitation, to herself, as the sound of their voices now in whispered colloquy, now in merry laughter, reaches her from the other end of the room. Once she does make an attempt to rout the enemy by saying,

"I am sure you must be boring Mr. Poynter, Daisy. Young men never care for china."

"I should care for anything that Daisy showed me," he replies blithely enough, and the tone of intimate assurance makes Miss Bertram wince. She feels absolutely guilty of disloyalty to Sir Bolingbroke, to whose cause she has pledged herself, in permitting even this much intercourse between this exceedingly detrimental young man and the Daisy whom Sir Bolingbroke desires to gather.



"I will give him a hint this evening to be prompt; it's no use his being a laggard in love if he wants to secure Daisy; and I'll take care that this sort of thing doesn't occur again."

Meanwhile all her plans are being quietly defeated by the young pair, who are unconscious that she is making them.

"I'll be in the Row to-morrow at twelve, and you won't let that fellow who was with you yesterday cut into the conversation I want to have with you about Burnsleigh, will you?" he says appealingly to Daisy, and Daisy gives him her promise delightedly.

"I was so surprised to hear from St. Briac to-day that Willie is tutor to St. Briac's young brother, Gerald."

"Yes; isn't it a good thing for Willie?"

So you know St. Briac? Will you be there to-night?"

"At Lady Beauton's? Yes. Will you?"

"I will; and it will be the happiest of all my balls," the girl cries out frankly. "Do you remember, when you were home the last time, how we used to waltz in the schoolroom every evening? I've often thought of it since I have been up here; and I've never had such a partner as you ever since."

"We always went together well, didn't we?" he responds. It makes him very happy to find that even his waltzing, which was not especially good at the time to which Daisy refers, is glorified in Daisy's memory. It makes him even happier to feel that he will be able to give her many opportunities to-night of discovering the

improvement which has taken place in his "manner of going" since then. He proceeds to improve the shining hours by seeking to engage Daisy at once for the first two round dances. But Daisy is conscientious. She is engaged to Lord St. Briac for the first, and to Sir Bolingbroke for the second; and disagreeable as it will be to dance with the latter now, she will stand to her engagements.

His eyes grow anxious as she announces this; for brief as has been his sojourn in the gay, reckless, brilliant, money-loving world of London, he has learnt enough already to know that Sir Bolingbroke, despite his antecedents, is a dangerous rival. About St. Briac he has no alarm, for it is well known that he has promised his family that he will surrender to the charms of Miss Millard's money-bags.

Moreover St. Briac did not express the faintest or most ordinary admiration for Daisy when he was speaking of her brother this morning. Whereas Harry has seen with his own eyes the light in which Sir Bolingbroke openly regarded her. So in blissful ignorance of where the real danger lies, Mr. Poynter makes up his mind to devote all his energies to keeping her apart from the Baronet this night at the ball.

“I wish we were both back at Burnsleigh,” he whispers; and she looks up at him shyly, and he sees that his wish is reflected in her eyes and echoing in her heart. If he will only speak out now to his old playfellow and early love, all will be well with them. But he does not know this; and he fears his fate a little too much, and Miss Bertram calls him in a peremptory

manner to her side, and the opportunity is over.

But his hand clasps hers very lingeringly when he bids her good-bye, and he associates himself with her in a way that is grievous to her aunt by saying,

“You’ll help me to make out a programme of the rejoicings that Lincoln insists must take place when I go home, won’t you, Daisy? The days for roasting bullocks whole are over; but we’ll do something very quaint and curious in the way of village festivities if you will only help me.”

“Does the whole village belong to you, then?” Miss Bertram asks bluntly.

“Not at all; Granville is the monarch of nearly all that is to be surveyed down at Burnsleigh. Glenholme is a pretty little place though, isn’t it, Daisy? and I hope



I shall have the pleasure of welcoming you to it some day, Miss Bertram."

There is something so joyous and thorough about him that Miss Bertram cannot snub him for his audacity, as she longs to do. She even suffers a severe smile to play over her virgin lips as she replies,

"Thank you ; but I am not likely to visit Burnsleigh, the air of that part of the country never did agree with me. Scotland and the North of England suit me much better. I am looking forward to spending part of the autumn up in the Highlands with my dear niece."

Now Sir Bolingbroke Bray's estates, as all men know, are up in Scotland. No wonder that, after Miss Bertram fires this parting shot at him, Mr. Poynter takes his departure with the fixed idea in his mind,

namely, that Miss Bertram is a manœuvring, match-making, malignant old woman, from whose clutches it behoves him to rescue Daisy as soon as possible.

Everything is in full swing at Lady Beauton's ball this evening when Miss Bertram and Daisy gallantly and gaspingly force a passage through the crowd that throngs the staircase and ante-rooms. Miss Millard and her mamma have been received with the most flattering *empressement* by the Marchioness of Beauton, who, before their arrival, has implored her son, with tears in her eyes, to 'rid her of that appalling old woman without necessary delay immediately after her advent."

"For your sake, dear boy," the affectionate and devoted mother has said, "I am prepared to go any lengths as far as the



girl is concerned; but the mother! St. Briac, you must make her understand that she is not to come near me *once* after I have received her. I feel my health giving way every time she approaches me; and as I don't want to break down before your marriage, you must really keep her away from me."

"Yes, if you can only weather out the storm till I have won my gentle bride, we'll smother the old lady comfortably under some of her own cotton-bales afterwards," St. Briac laughs.

"And you will come to a conclusion with Miss Millard to-night, St. Briac?" his mother asks somewhat nervously; for the Millard alliance is one that will restore the rather emaciated fortunes of the house of Beauton.

Accordingly, though Miss Millard is

only a few degrees less detestable than her mother in the eyes of the Marchioness, the understanding of the Marchioness teaches her that Miss Millard is a highly-desirable wife for her son. There is a touch of asperity, as well as of anxiety, in the tone in which she asks the young man, who has been playing the big fish for some months now, if he intends to land it to-night.

“Well, yes; it’s ‘in the bond’ that I do so, I suppose,” he says, with a sigh.

And as he pledges him anew to pursue the course which is to recoup the fortunes of his house, he thinks of a girl who had not shone out like a star brightly fair when he first gave in his adhesion to society—a girl whose fair beauty and rare grace and sweet he stately charm would grace a coronet, or a crown for that matter—and his heart and

his taste revolt against the bride he is sworn to win as he remembers Daisy.

The deed has to be done this night, and St. Briac sets about the preliminaries, which have to be gone through, with the best grace he has at command. He is a fine specimen of a young patrician, and he looks a very knight of courtesy as he advances to Miss Millard and claims that young lady's hand for the dance, and attention to his deserts. And as she yields him both he thinks of Daisy again—thinks of her with a thrilling mixture of intense admiration and yearning regret.

Miss Millard is not the sort of girl to be married for her money only; for she is a bonny-looking creature of the fair, fresh, rather fat order. Her face is a very comely one, full of good temper (when

nothing occurs to put her out), and expressive of a fair amount of intelligence, and resolution to have a full recognition accorded to her merits. She has ruled, a little queen, in every coterie into which she has hitherto gone, both in Cottonopolis and London. But this season she has been taught that there are realms in which she may not hope to reign. She has been sought by great ladies of the Marchioness of Beauton's clique; but they have, one and all, taught her that in their society she can have no sovereignty, no place, nor power, indeed, of any kind, unless she and her gold come among them endorsed by the approval, which marriage is supposed to express, of such a one as Lord St. Briac.

She has accepted their dicta readily enough; indeed, she is a consenting party to the scheme which has been propounded

for St. Briac's benefit. She likes St. Briac very well for himself—that is to say, she has seen no one whom she likes better than St. Briac. But she *loves* the prospect of being a marchioness; and she is quite contented to see her mother ignored and put into the shade by these *grande dames*, while she herself is graduating for the place she is eventually to hold among them.

But she is not quite contented to be put into the shade herself by a “mere penniless nobody” like Daisy Eldon. If a duke's unmarried daughter cuts the ground from under her feet, Julia Millard bears the shock heroically; but that an obscure country girl, without a farthing to bless herself with, should execute the same feat unintentionally is a very bitter drop in the cup which fashionable life is holding to Miss Millard's

lips just at present. St. Briac has been in pretty constant attendance on her lately ; but she has seen him in the Row glance too admiringly, for the glance to be tolerated by her, after that matchless trotter, the Knave of Hearts. If there is one thing on which Miss Millard prides herself, it is on her horsemanship. She really does know what she is about on horseback ; and in spite of her figure erring a little in some of its lines, in consequence of that tendency towards fat which the most rigorous regimen cannot quite subdue, she looks very well in the saddle. But Daisy looks better ; and quietly as she insists upon the Knave conducting himself, Daisy attracts more attention than falls to Miss Millard's share. And so there is something of bitterness in the *bonhomie* with which Miss Millard says,

“Do you know who that marvellously handsome man is who chained Daisy Eldon to the rails in the Row the day before yesterday? She made quite an exhibition of her eagerness to talk to him.”

## CHAPTER V.

“DAISY ELDON is incapable of making an exhibition of herself in any but a charming way,” Lord St. Briac replies, and something in his tone makes Miss Millard glance sharply at him.

Rumour has told her already that if Daisy had been endowed with one half the wealth which is to be her (Julia Millard’s) portion, Lord St. Briac would not have dallied in his wooing. So she glances sharply at him now as she detects the tremor in the tone in which he speaks Daisy’s name.

She looks at him at an unlucky moment. Daisy has just come into the room with her aunt, and St. Briac's eyes are fixed upon her with a look of such ardent irrepressible admiration and regard that Julia, the heiress, tingles with jealousy. Daisy, in a dress of creamy-white silk, with pearls on her neck and arms, and a sash of flowers, is looking lovelier than ever this night. The unmistakable love-light is in her eyes as she looks shyly round the assembled throng in search of the one without whose presence now the most brilliant scene would seem dull and tame to her. The love-light is in her eyes; and Miss Millard, who is neither stupid nor devoid of experience, recognises its sympathetic fire, and mistakenly supposes that it is burning for St. Briac. There is not a particle of love in the fair Julia's breast for her lordly suitor, nevertheless she thrills

with rage as she sees his eyes riveted on Daisy's bonny beauty. A dozen men are crowding round the latter, eagerly seeking to inscribe the name of the beauty of the season on their cards. But presently she is whirled off by one who is a stranger to the majority of those present; and St. Briac recalling himself to a sense of his duty towards Miss Millard, turns to her and pursues his own train of thought aloud, without regarding the fact that she may not have watched Daisy's proceedings with a tender interest equal to his own.

"I wonder how Poynter has got to know her already," he says meditatively. "Did you see? He took her off in a sort of old familiar-friend style that looks like having known her a long time; and that can't be the case, for he's only just back from six or seven years in Australia."

“He was the handsome man I was telling you about, the one Miss Eldon was making an exhibition of herself with in the Row the other morning. You didn’t seem to like the phrase; but I couldn’t think of any other that would fittingly describe the situation.”

“Shall we take a turn?” he interrupts. He has no desire to hear anything about Daisy from Miss Millard just now, and especially has he no desire to hear more about Daisy’s intercourse with “that good-looking young fellow, Poynter,” whose handsome face, as St. Briac is liberally willing to admit, is sufficient to win him the favour of any woman.

“The room is getting too crowded to dance comfortably,” Miss Millard says; and she indicates that she would like to be led into the cool and low-lighted shades of

a conservatory which they are passing at the moment.

It is well understood by them all that the offer is to be made to-night, and Miss Millard thinks the sooner the better now, as, when once she has plighted her maiden troth to him, she will have the right to reprimand him as sharply as she desires for his ill-concealed tender feeling for Daisy Eldon.

“It is no use kicking against the pricks,” he tells himself, as he leads her along between alleys of the choicest exotics to a seat at the further end of the conservatory. His fate is before him, and he must fulfil it. Not such a bad fate after all, as times go. Miss Millard will bring him fifty thousand a year, and is in herself the sort of girl to deserve a very warm regard from the man she marries. She is affectionate, quite

clever enough and good-looking enough for every-day life; and it is not her fault that she appears to be made of very common clay indeed, by the side of that piece of delicate porcelain, Daisy Eldon. "Besides," the young heir to the Marquisate of Beauton tells himself, "it would perhaps be a bore to marry a girl one was very much in love with." He feels sure that when Julia is Lady St. Briac she may follow the fashion of the day and flirt as only young matrons seem free to do, without causing him one jealous qualm. Whereas, if he could only afford to marry Daisy he would surely grudge every look and word she gave to any other man. Even as he thinks this he sees Daisy and Harry Poynter saunter into the conservatory by a side-door, and sit down in a nook where they are half hidden by the gracious screen of foliage and flowers, and though she is not

his wife he feels the jealous qualm with sickening intensity.

“How silent you are!” Miss Millard says pettishly. She did not bring him in here to see him watching Daisy Eldon in dumb anguish. “He may moon and spoon about her and after her as much as he likes after we are married,” the practical girl tells herself; “but I won’t stand any sentimental nonsense about her now. I’ll give him to understand before we move from here that he must choose between us without any further delay.”

He cannot tear his eyes and attention from Daisy, whom he sees listening with joyful eyes to something Harry Poynter is saying to her; but he answers the charge of silence which Julia has brought against him courteously enough.

“Don’t you know there are some

moments when the thoughts of the heart  
'fill the silence like a speech'?"

"That is only the case, I should think, when one is very much in love or very much in debt," she answers; and St. Briac is afraid that his indifference to this girl may merge into positive dislike before he has taken the decided step which all his family expect him to take. She is more than a little out of temper now, and, as is invariably the case with an underbred woman, she relinquishes all efforts at being either courteous or kind when she is annoyed. Her tone is sharpened, her eyes sparkle vindictively, and there is altogether an air of defiance, not to say swagger, about her which revolts him as she says,

"Perhaps, if you want to ponder on either of the themes I've mentioned, you'll be good enough to take me back into the ballroom.

first ; I may amuse myself better there than I am doing here."

For a moment he is tempted to take her at her word, lead her back to her mother, and go to his mother with the statement that he found it impossible to swallow the<sup>b</sup> pill, gloriously as it is gilded. Then he reminds himself of his debts, and of the futility of his hankering after Daisy, and so, though he will not throw the handkerchief just yet, he waves it before Miss Millard's eyes.

"Before this night is over you will know what the feeling was that chained my tongue, and I think you will forgive me."

He murmurs this just as though he were really in love with her ; and as she is quite as well contented with the semblance as the reality, she relents, relapses into smiles, and prepares herself to say "Yes" at once. But he feels that he cannot bind himself till he

has had one dance with, and said a few words to Daisy Eldon. So he rises and offers his arm to Miss Millard with the words,

“We’ll come back here again by and by won’t we? and then you shall hear the secret of my silence;” and leads her up the side to where Daisy and Harry Poynter are still sitting.

“Miss Eldon, you defrauded me of my waltz; may I have the honour of another? This next—may it be mine?”

“I am engaged for it to Har—Mr. Poynter,” she says hesitatingly.

“Poynter, be a good fellow; let me have one turn with Miss Eldon,” St. Briac pleads, so eagerly that both Harry and Daisy find themselves agreeing to his request. The four stroll back to the ball-room together.

Their progress in company is a very brief one; but brief as it is, and satisfied as Miss

Millard now feels that St. Briac will formally surrender to her to-night, she cannot resist firing one shot at her rival.

"Are you going to Hurlingham to-morrow, Miss Eldon?"

"I believe not. Aunt Bertram doesn't enjoy polo; and I am not interested on either side to-morrow," Daisy answers.

"Not interested on either side? O you incorrigible little flirt! How can you say you're not interested when we all know that Sir Bolingbroke Bray will be playing on his famous pony 'Daisy'?"

END OF VOL. II.

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